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BIG SPIRITS COMICS SPECIAL

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12

伊藤 悠

Itoh Yu

BIG SPIRITS COMICS SPECIAL

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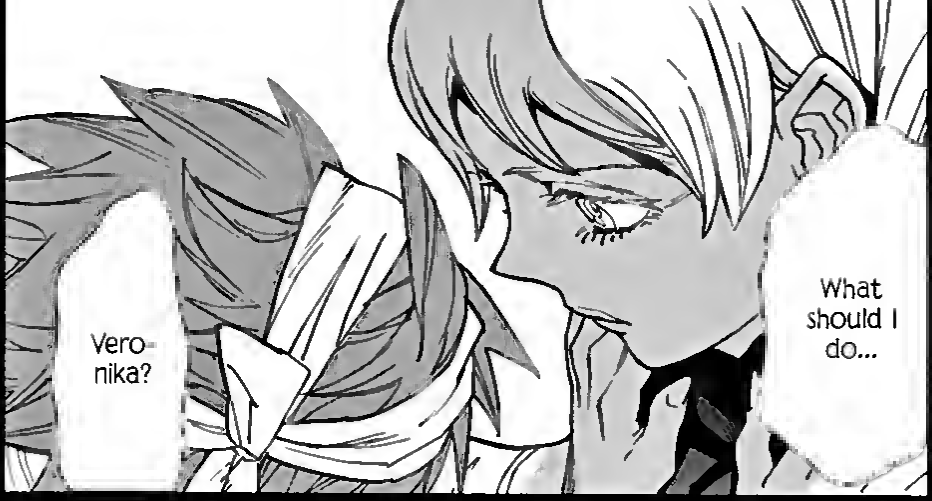
*THE COVER FLAP READS "VICISSITUDES" IN TANGUT SCRIPT

[Chapter LXXIII]

Vitality


Vero-
nika?
What
should I
do...

My
friend died.
He died.
I wasn't
even able
get back
his trea-
sure.
What
have
I been
doing?
What am
I here
for...?

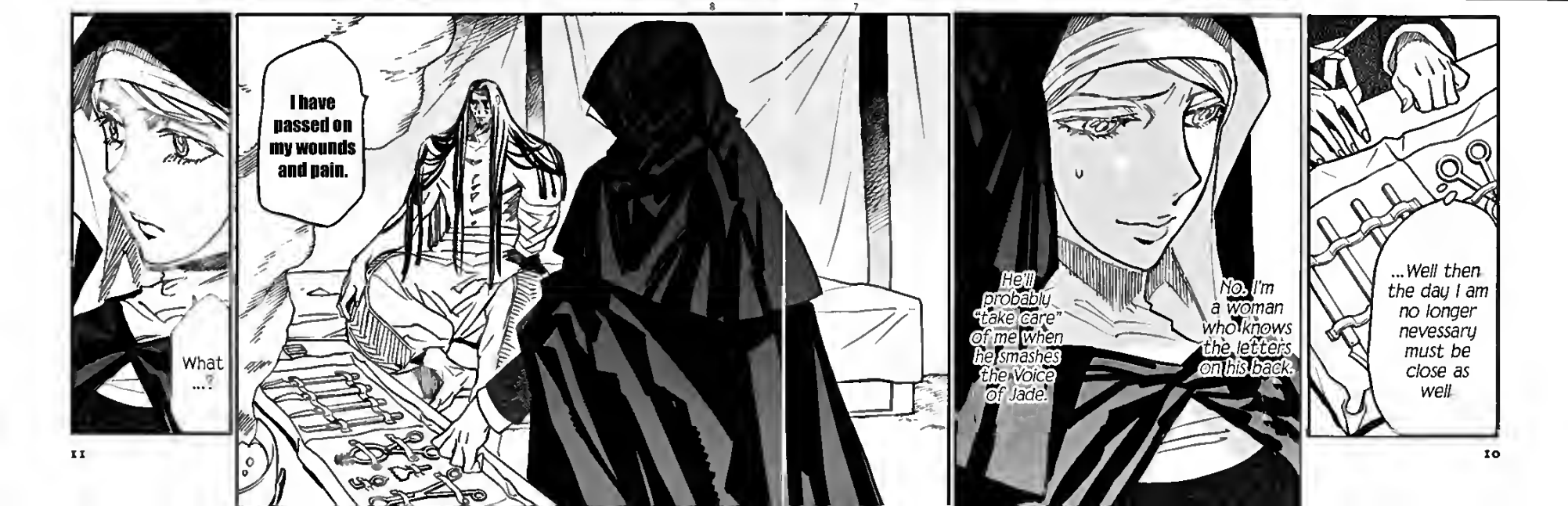
Even Shut Hell
is gone...
"Shut Hell" is gone...?
They say there's a sickness that splits the mind in two...
Could what I'm seeing be one side of such a mind?
Even so,
she's pitifully haggard.
This is the "Shut Hell" who declared that her homeland of Western Xia was finished with a smile on her face.

Your friend...? What can you have to lose at this poi–
ド"
...Please.

don't say anything for a bit... Veronika.
I'm so lonely... I think I might die.
Stop this.
Mph ...
.....

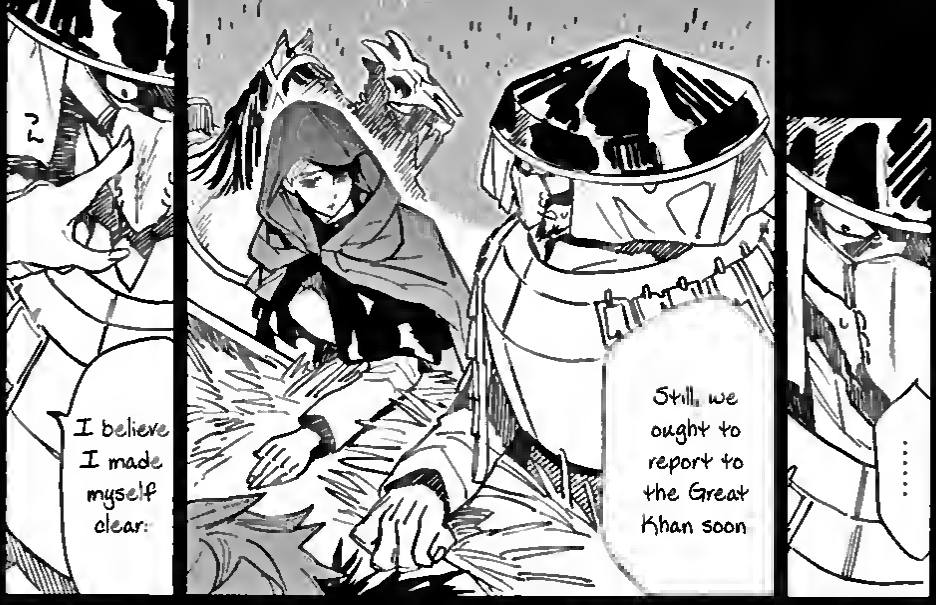
Has ceased.
My lord, the pain in your back...?
THE MONGOL CAMP, EAST PAST JUYONGGUAN--
...I am glad.
The day his pain is cured...
It vanished completely once we smashed Juyongguan.

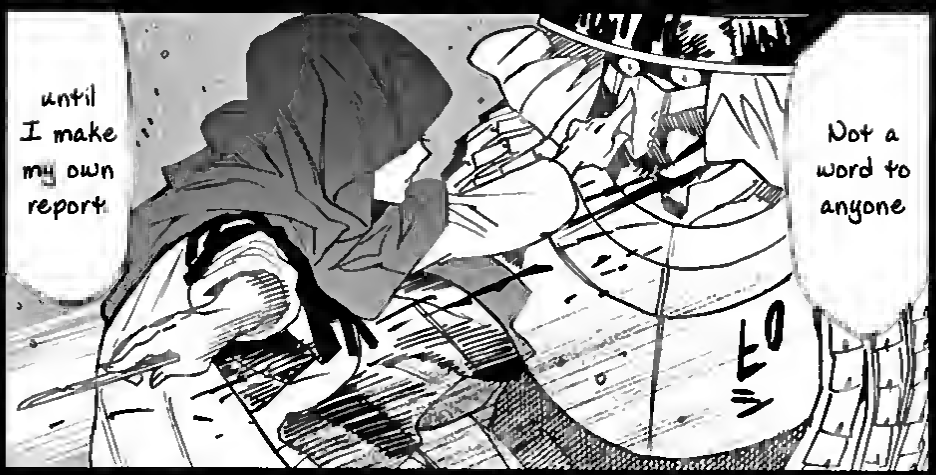
They never stopped bleeding, no matter how many times I stitched them up, but I can't see any blood now.
It's true; his burns never cooled before, but now the heat has left them.

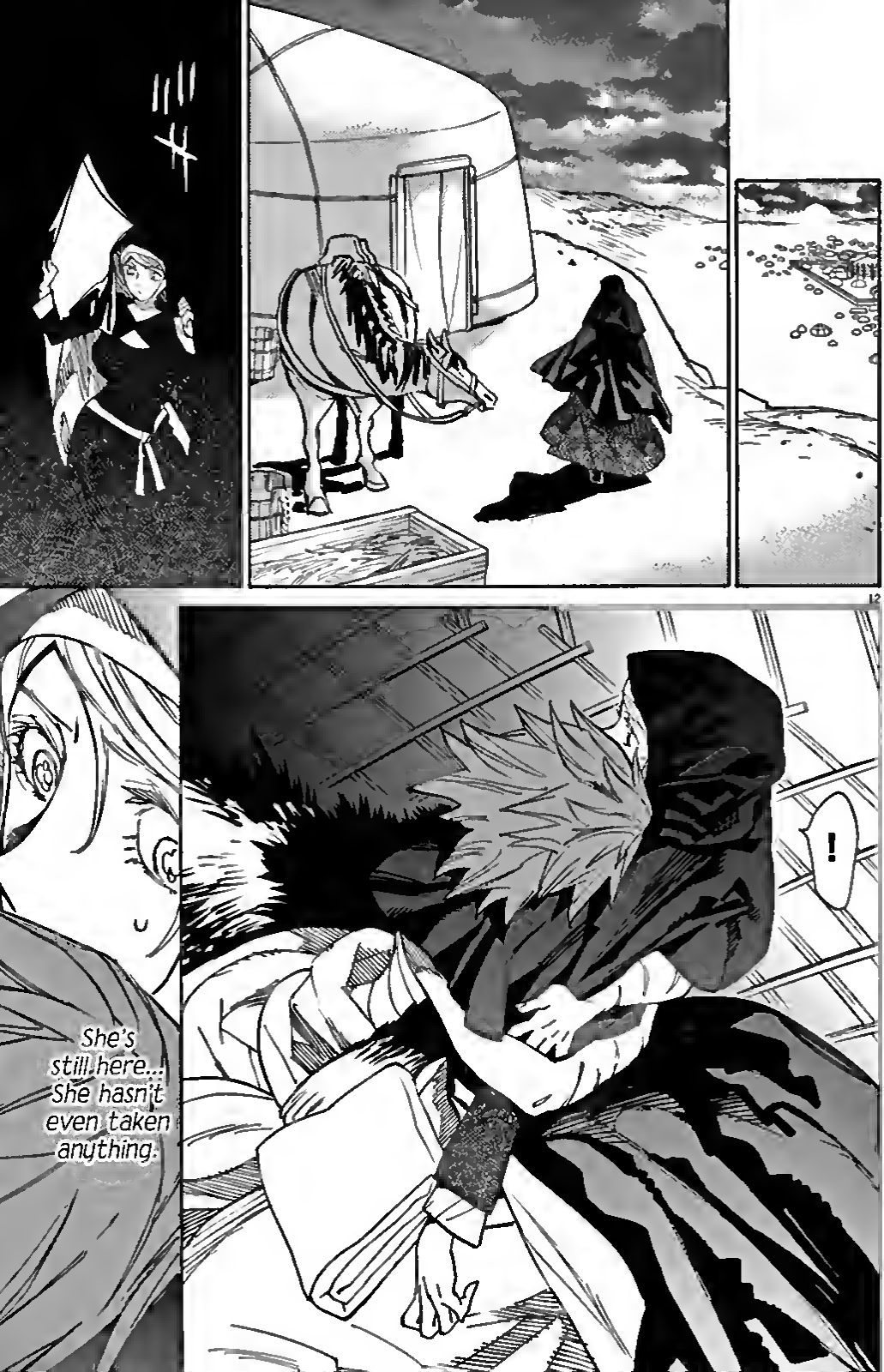

What ...?
I have passed on my wounds and pain.
He'll probably "take care" of me when he smashes the Voice of Jade.
No. I'm a woman who knows the letters on his back.
...Well then the day I am no longer nevessary must be close as well

My body is one arm lighter.
Once I have devoured Jin, let us gallop west.
West,
to the homeland you long to burn.
At last.

Back then, what was it that prompted me
At last, my lord, west.
to bring home something so dangerous...?
Please watch your step, Lady Veronika.
It appears ash and smoke from Juyongguan are falling with the rain again.
They missed the arteries...
It looks like some fragments grazed her.


I believe I made myself clear.
Still, we ought to report to the Great Khan soon
……


until I make my own report.
Not a word to anyone
ヒソ


!
She's still here... She hasn't even taken anything.

It's as though you're receiving vitality from the warmth of my body each night.
Were you exhausted as all that, "Shut Hell"?
with only beasts and iron for company?
How long have you slept
It's just... warm.
Still, I don't feel like she's taking from me.

...Burn scars.
"Ma," "ga"...?
It says "witch" in the letters of the West.
Sorry.

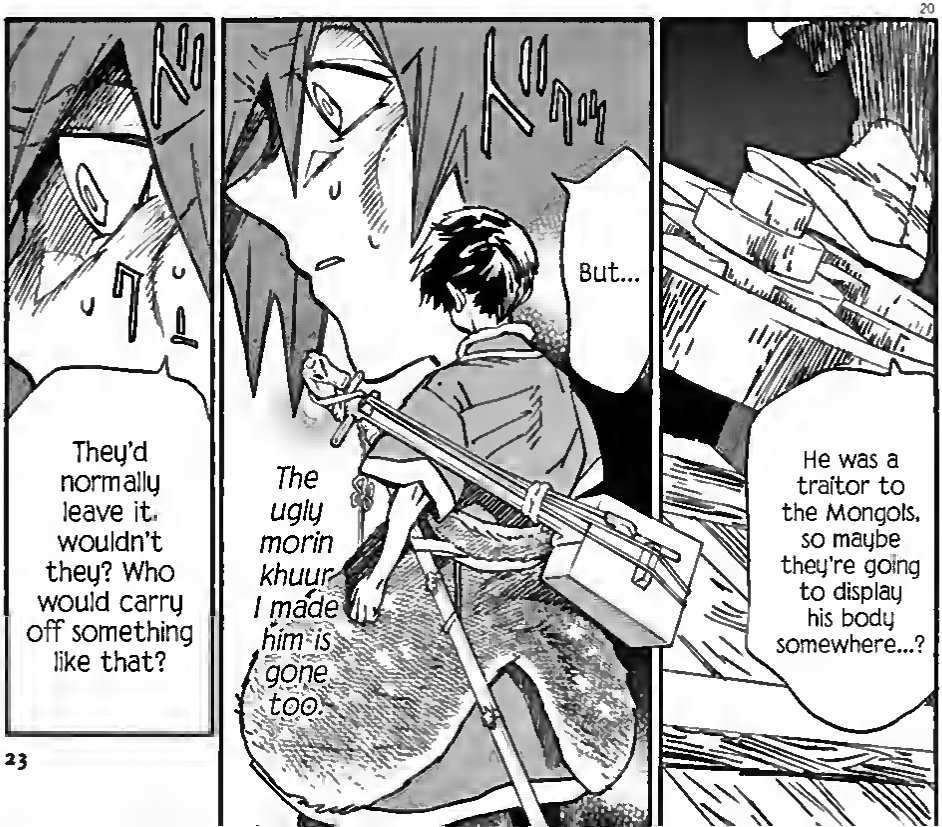
It's fine. It reminds me of my past
and the hate that keeps me going.
"...I wonder if the Mongols will burn away my homeland for me..."
Vero-nika.
That's right...

A reason for living, huh? What's mine, then?
Watching the Mongols invade Europe
is her reason for living.
So... what am I doing living in this place, in this era?
Yurul is gone.
The fact that I'm here in this body must mean that Shut Hell isn't completely dead.
I temporarily returned to the present.
When Shut Hell died, and her mind was completely gone,

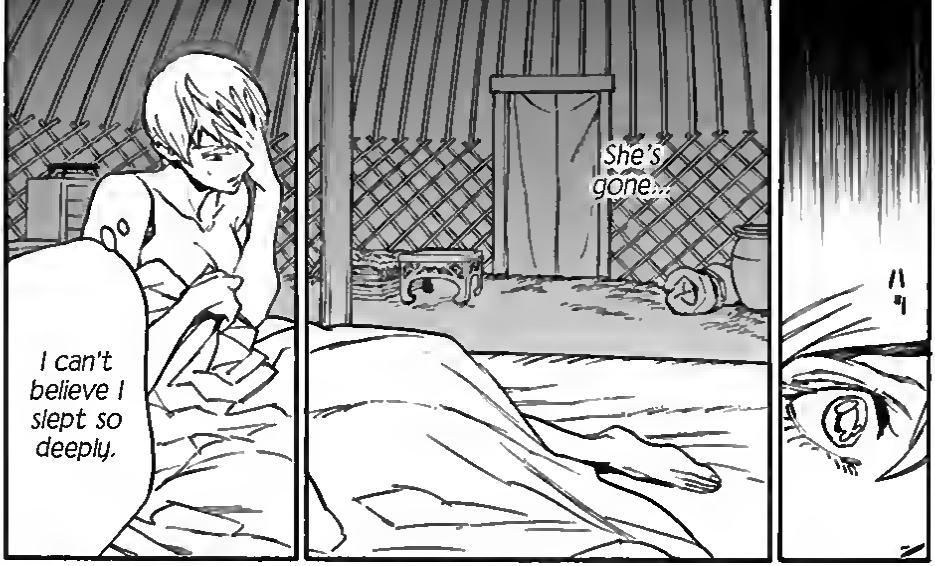
But I can't feel her presence at all.
Does that mean Shut Hell lost her reason to live when Yurul died...?
Shit ...
I've got zero reason to be in this era.
That said, even if I kill this body right away, there's no guarantee that I'll be able to go home.
Both me and Shut Hell might just die.
Besides, even if I could go home, the Tangut script would still be gone, and so would Suzuki.
Because Yurul died there...
"...I intended to carry your remains."
"I wanted to at least give you a proper funeral."
...Aah...

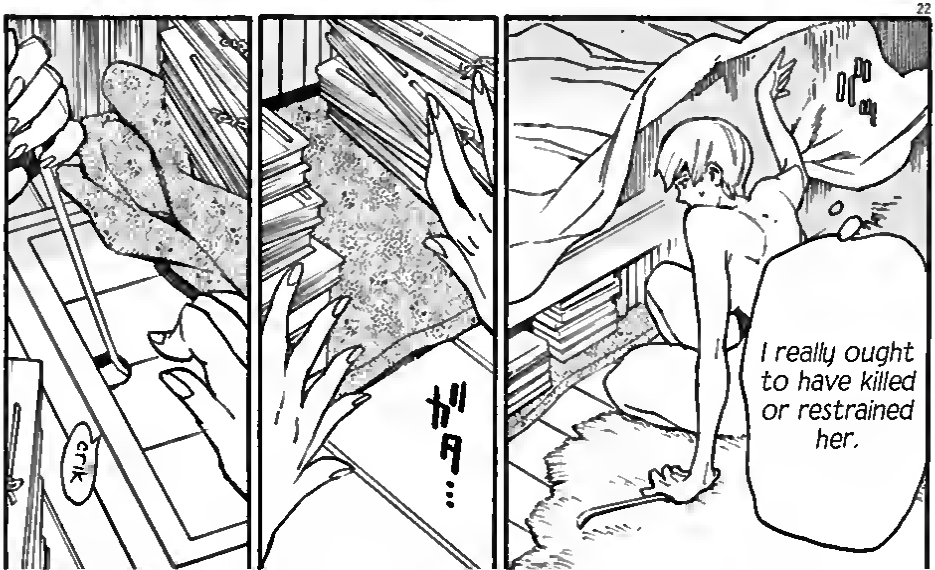
I don't want to see his body, but I have to go.
I'll bury him. I'll bury Yurui.
You can still see the bodies of the war dead all over.
What the hell have I been doing...?
Some friend I am.
When Shut Hell was killed, Yurui came to bury her properly, but I...

...Has he already been buried or cremated...?
Gone...
But I'm sure Yurul died here.
His body's not here!
But the other bodies were just left here.
Does that mean only Yurul's was moved somewhere...?


They'd normally leave it, wouldn't they? Who would carry off something like that?
But...
The ugly morin khuur I made him is gone too.
He was a traitor to the Mongols, so maybe they're going to display his body somewhere...?

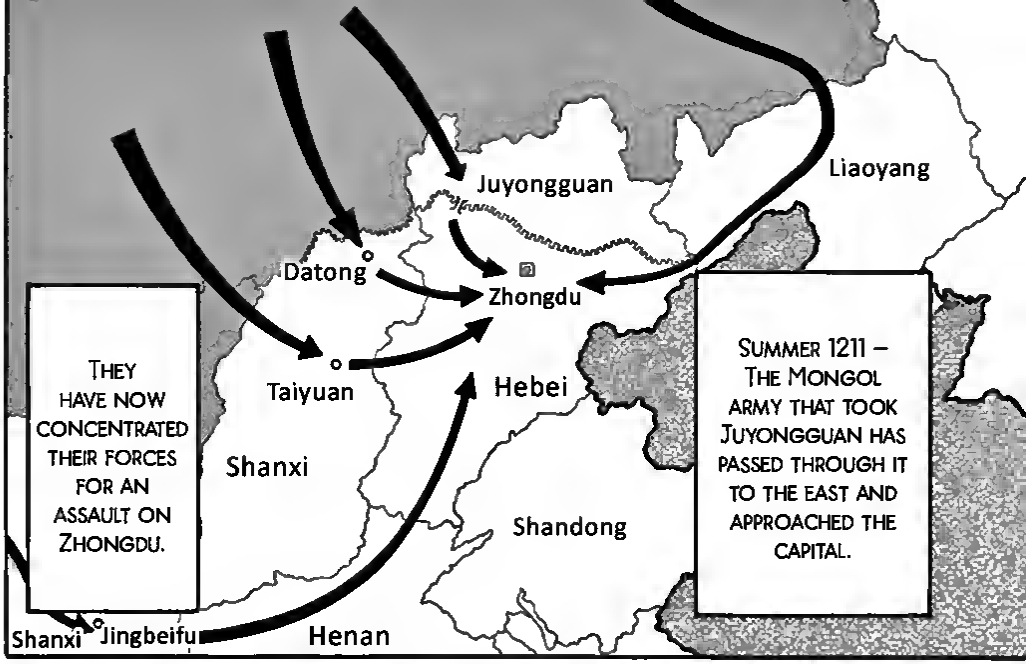
Yurul, could it be
that somewhere, you're...?

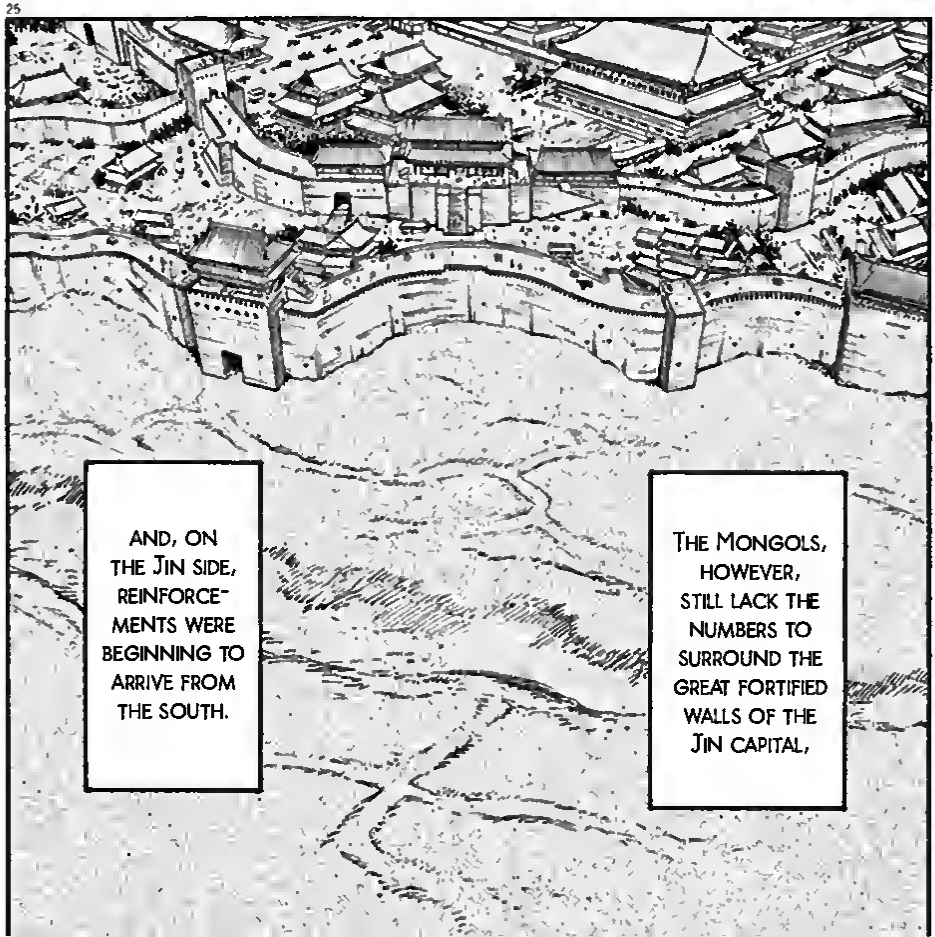

I can't believe I slept so deeply.
She's gone...
Did she notice it and carry it off?

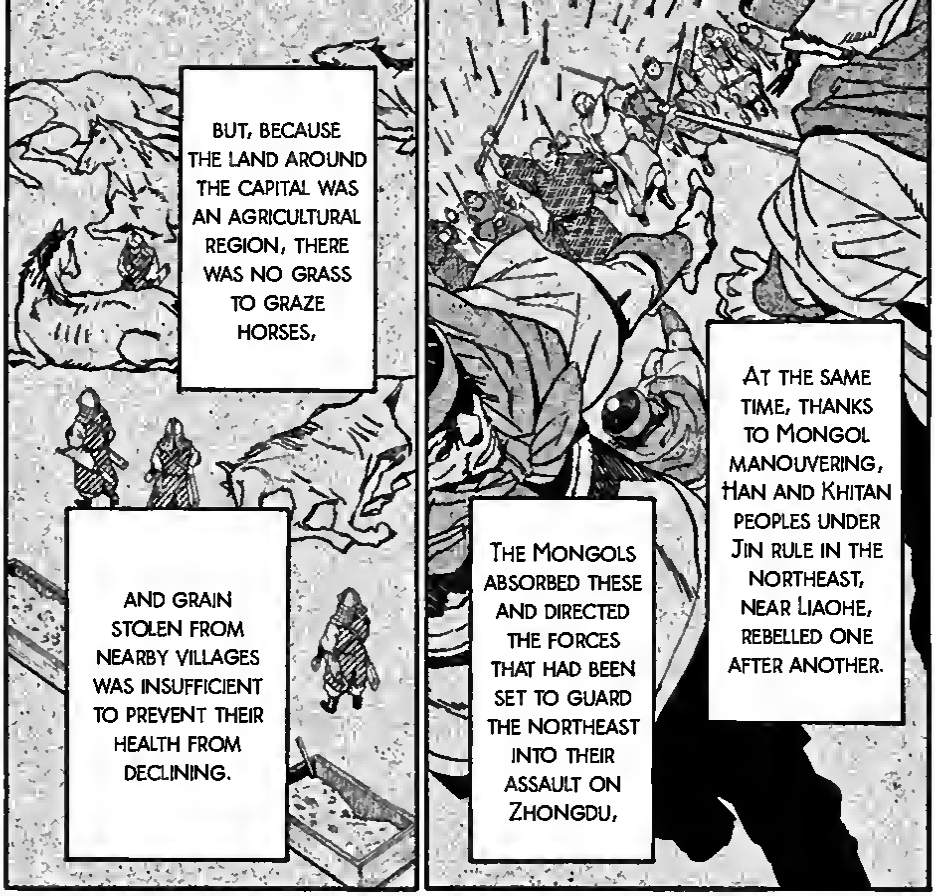

I really ought to have killed or restrained her.

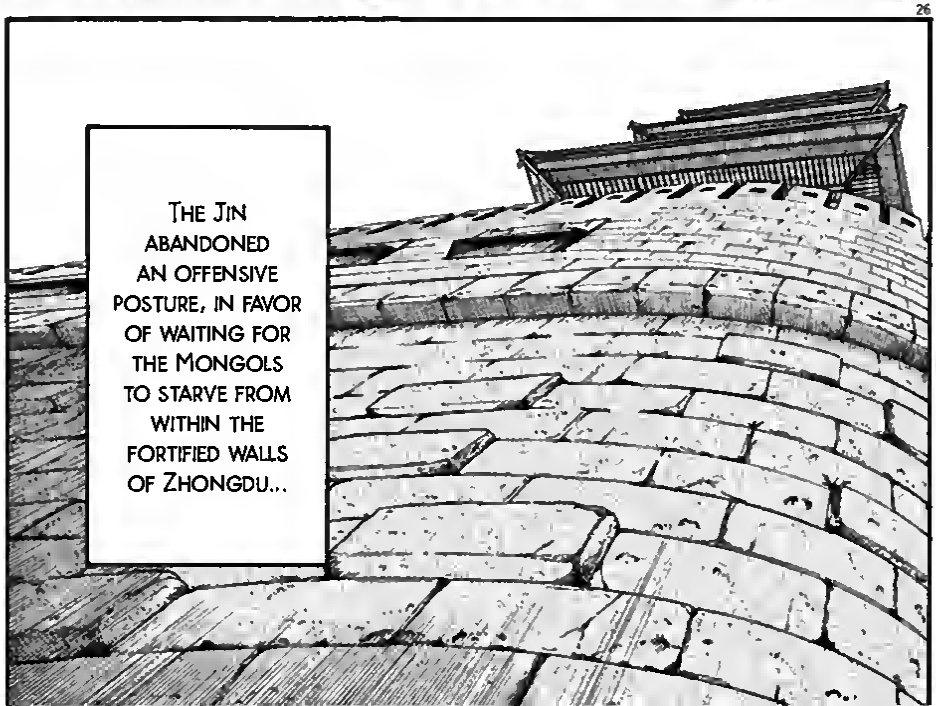
It's here.
but only half – five tablets.
The Voice of Jade...
23
Even if we are still looking for the other half, why haven't I...?
I ought to present them to him at once.
The Voice of Jade, 5,886 Tangut characters inscribed on nine jade tablets.
The Mongols have undergone such troubles so that my lord may smash them with his own hands.

.....
So what...?
"I wasn't even able"
"to get back his treasure."
Rustle
(To Sudoh)

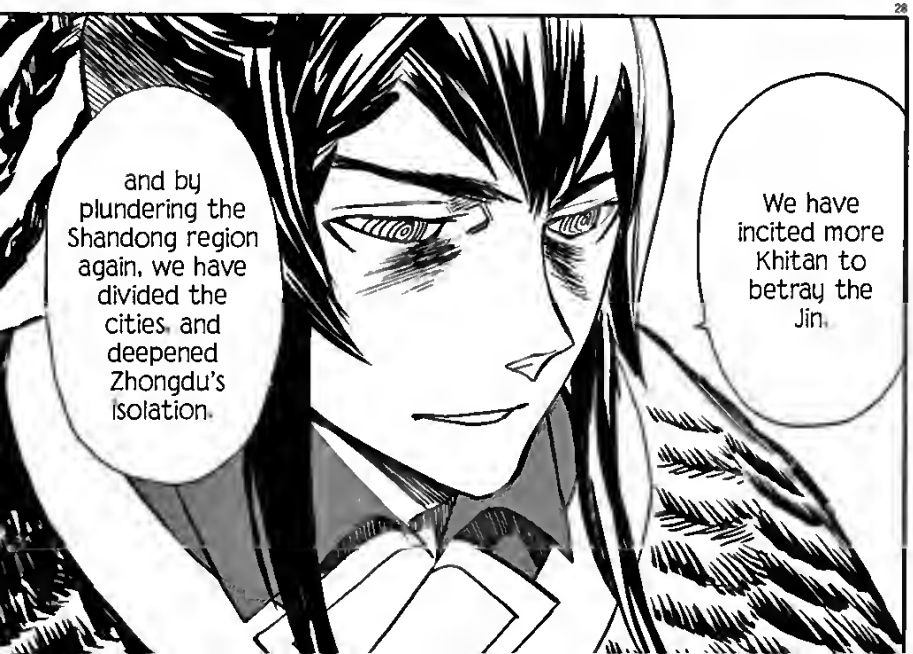

Juyongguan
Liaoyang
Datong
Zhongdu
Taiyuan
Hebei
Shanxi
Shandong
Shanxi
Jingbeifu
Henan
THEY HAVE NOW CONCENTRATED THEIR FORCES FOR AN ASSAULT ON ZHONGDU.
SUMMER 1211 – THE MONGOL ARMY THAT TOOK JUYONGGUAN HAS PASSED THROUGH IT TO THE EAST AND APPROACHED THE CAPITAL.


AND, ON THE JIN SIDE, REINFORCEMENTS WERE BEGINNING TO ARRIVE FROM THE SOUTH.
THE MONGOLS, HOWEVER, STILL LACK THE NUMBERS TO SURROUND THE GREAT FORTIFIED WALLS OF THE JIN CAPITAL,


BUT, BECAUSE THE LAND AROUND THE CAPITAL WAS AN AGRICULTURAL REGION, THERE WAS NO GRASS TO GRAZE HORSES,
AND GRAIN STOLEN FROM NEARBY VILLAGES WAS INSUFFICIENT TO PREVENT THEIR HEALTH FROM DECLINING.
THE MONGOLS ABSORBED THESE AND DIRECTED THE FORCES THAT HAD BEEN SET TO GUARD THE NORTHEAST INTO THEIR ASSAULT ON ZHONGDU,
AT THE SAME TIME, THANKS TO MONGOL MANOUVERING, HAN AND KHITAN PEOPLES UNDER JIN RULE IN THE NORTHEAST, NEAR LIAOHE, REBELLED ONE AFTER ANOTHER.

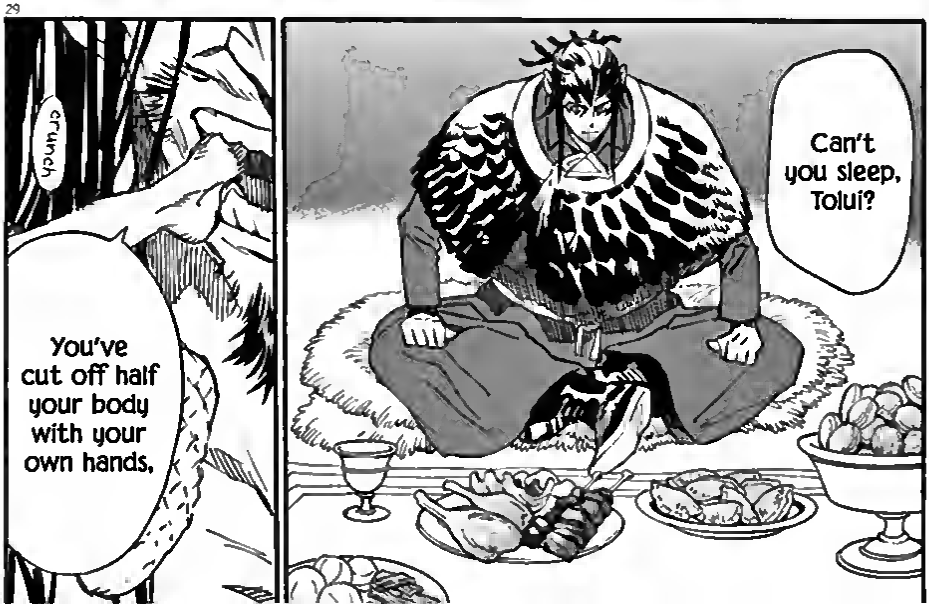

THE JIN ABANDONED AN OFFENSIVE POSTURE, IN FAVOR OF WAITING FOR THE MONGOLS TO STARVE FROM WITHIN THE FORTIFIED WALLS OF ZHONGDU...

The Jin king remains firmly entrenched in his capital.


We have incited more Khitan to betray the Jin.
and by plundering the Shandong region again, we have divided the cities and deepened Zhongdu's isolation.

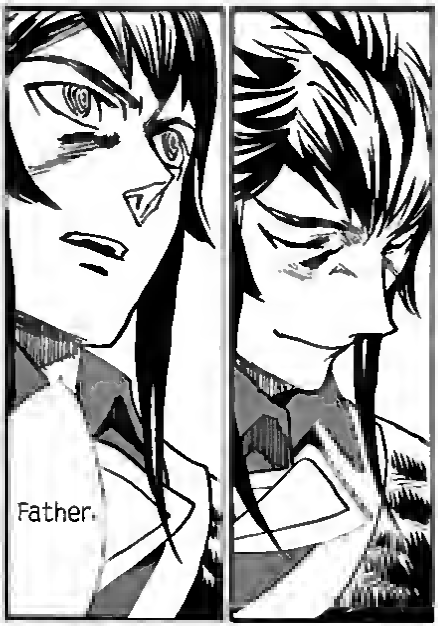
Liaoyang
Juyongguan
Zhongdu
Hebei
Shanxi
Shandong
Henan
The province of Liaoyang, home to the former Khitan capital, has all but surrendered to us.
It has been 80 years since the Jin destroyed the Khitan.
They may be subjugated, but most Khitan feel no loyalty to the Jin state.

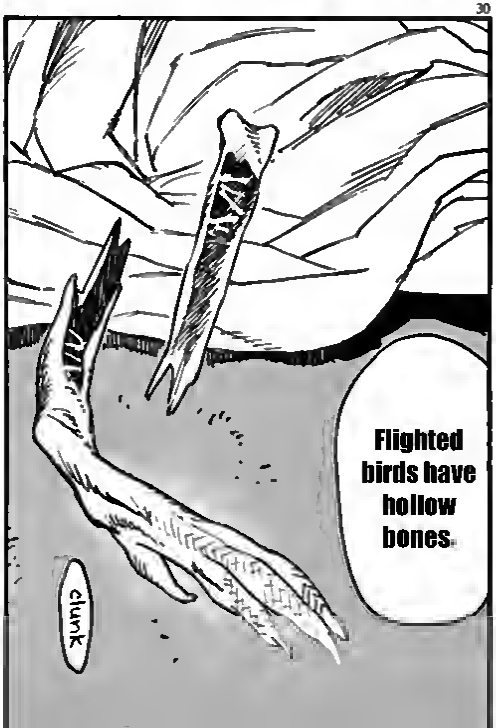
Showing people hope, stirring up discord, and inviting them to change sides.
This was Nalan's specialty.

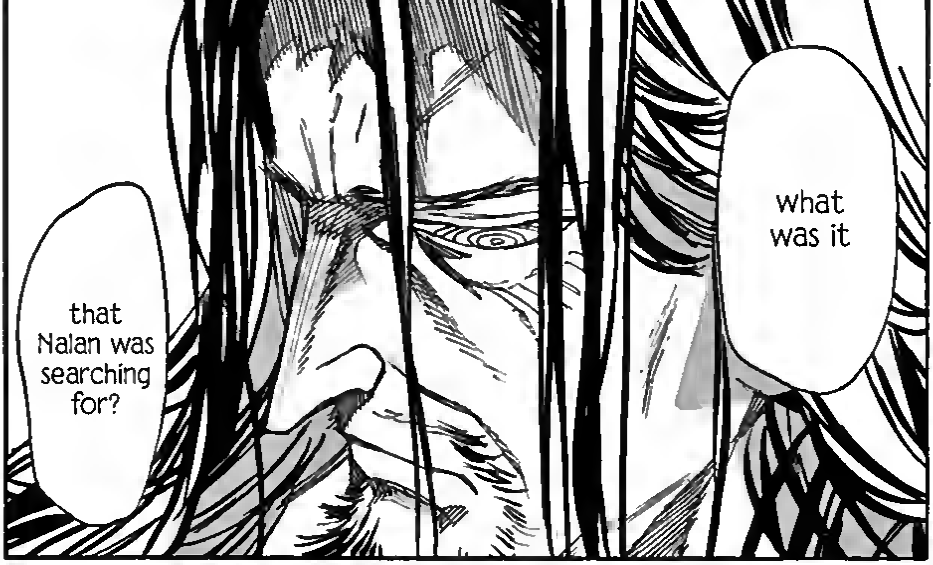

crunch
You've cut off half your body with your own hands.
Can't you sleep, Tolui?

so savor its lightness.

30


Father.


Flighted birds have hollow bones.
clunk


what was it
that Nalan was searching for?

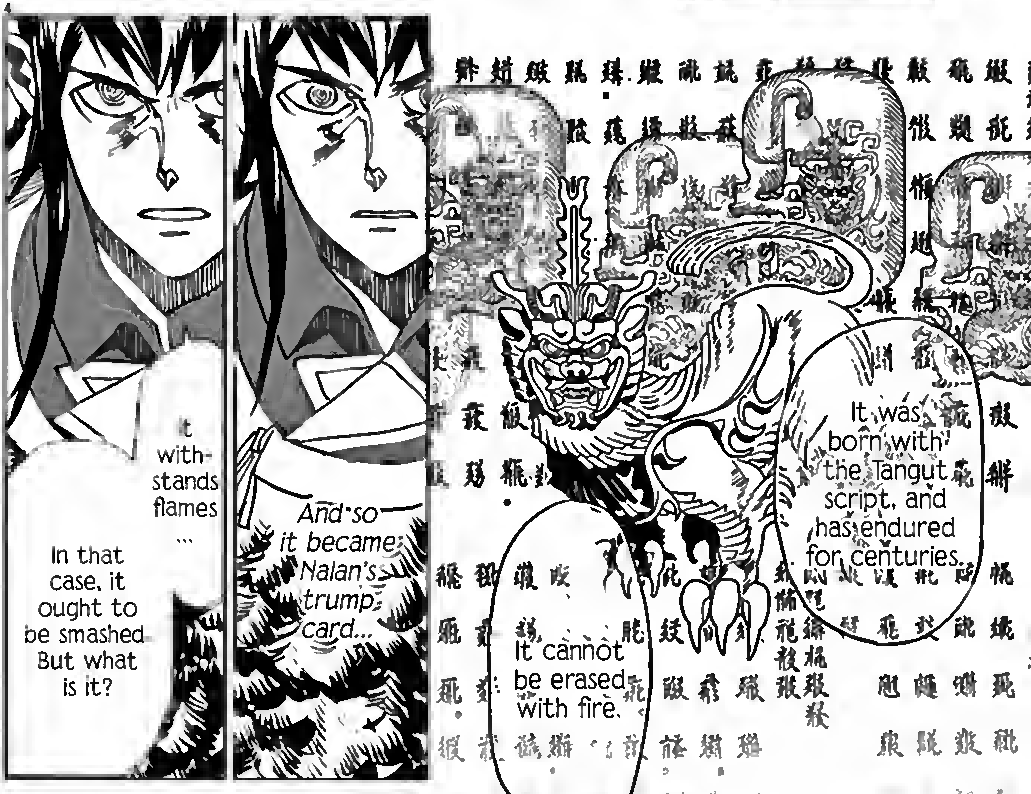
I must succeed to the task.

[Chapter LXXIV]
Conviction

...What was it
that Nalan was searching for?
"SLAVE OF THE TANGUT"
Nalan had already obtained it.

To the last letter.
I understand.
I knew it. Nalan had proof for his convictions about father's back.
Even the Great Academy, which held tens of thousands of texts in that script,
burned to the ground, along with Xingqing, capital of Western Xia.
Flames have washed away both books and tablets, and no more Tangut script will be written.
3
Tolui,
I will burn the Tangut script.

One last seed of the Tangut script remains.
No.


It withstands flames...
In that case, it ought to be smashed. But what is it?
And so it became Nalan's trump card...
It was born with the Tangut script, and has endured for centuries.
It cannot be erased with fire.

It is called the Voice of Jade.
Jade slabs engraved with every Tangut character.

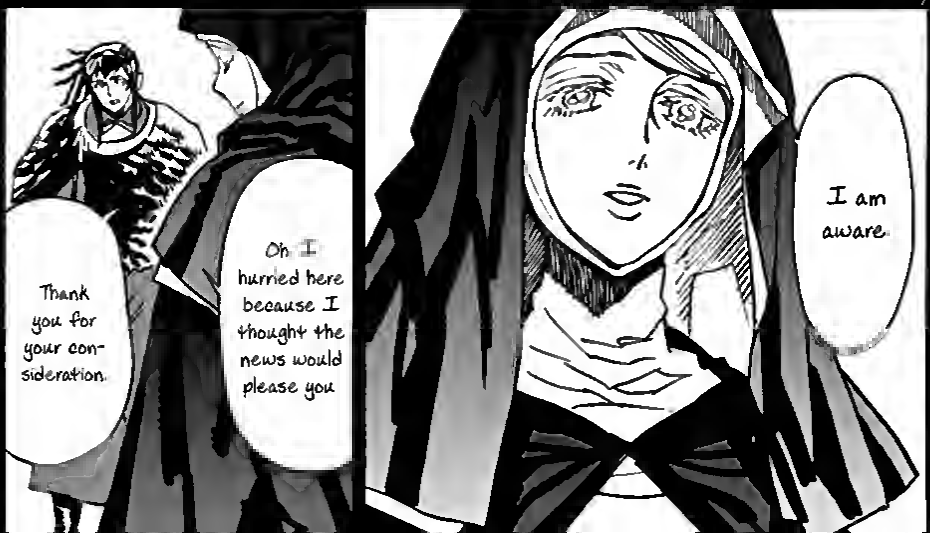
"The Voice of Jade"...

is what I must find.
The Voice of Jade. So that

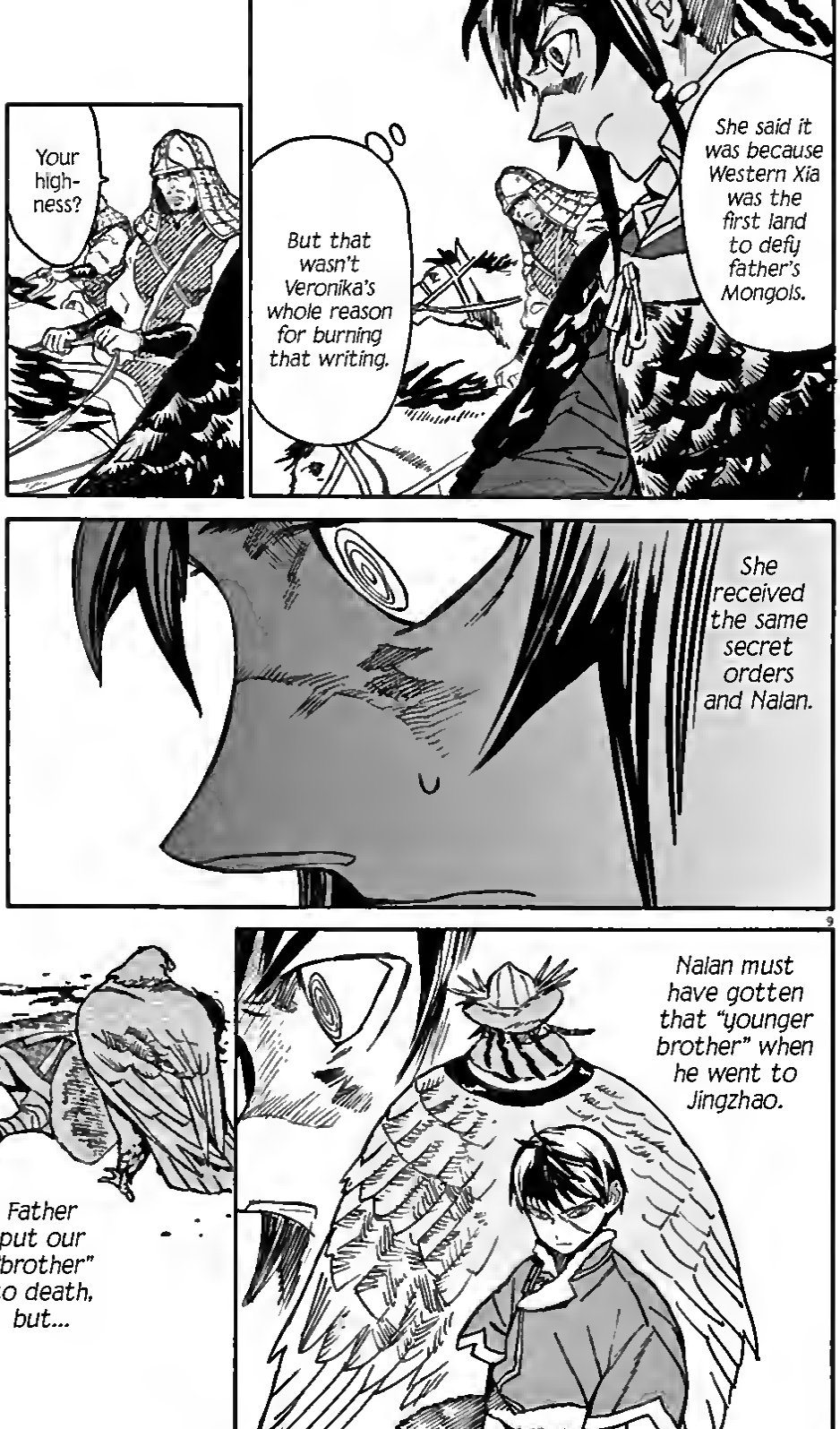
If Nalan drew his bow against father, then Nalan must have possessed it, and trusted in hiding it to protect him.
The Voice of Jade is a blemish on father – on the Mongols.
"The word 'slave' is burned into father's — the Great Khan's — back in Tangut script"
If, by some chance, someone learns of father's back...
I need to find the Voice of Jade before something happens.
Did he keep it hidden nearby, or did he keep it on him?
6
"and to ask if he has any pain."
"I only go to see to the state of his health,"

...Veronika knows!!

They say the Great Academy has burned to the ground.
TWO YEARS AGO—


Thank you for your consideration.
Oh, I hurried here because I thought the news would please you
I am aware.

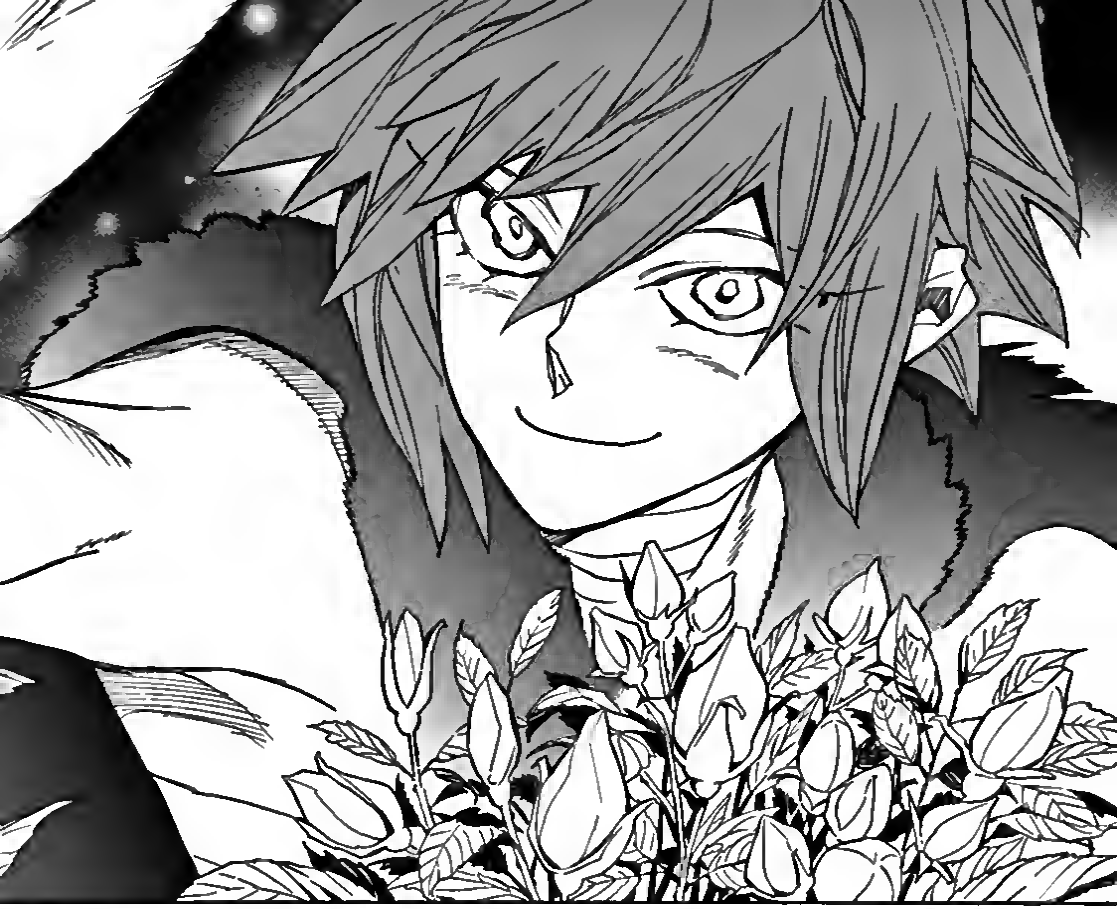
this writing will control the lands the Mongols have invaded.
It won't be much longer. Once we have a dictionary and a code of laws in these letters.
...Truly,
I am practically trembling with joy... your highness.
All 5,886 characters of the Western Xia will burn up,
and that fire will protect the Mongols, and make them even stronger.


Your high-ness?
But that wasn't Veronika's whole reason for burning that writing.
She said it was because Western Xia was the first land to defy father's Mongols.
She received the same secret orders and Nalan.
Nalan must have gotten that "younger brother" when he went to Jingzhao.
Father put our "brother" to death, but...

"We need Veronika."
"We need to defeat 'Shut Hell.' Veronika knows that enemy."
Nalan took Veronika with him to Jingzhao...
10
"Nalan had already obtained it."
Yes, highness...
This is far enough. Leave me.
Your highness, you look pale...

It couldn't be.
Natan... and Veronika.

!
flap
Su... doh ...?



Umm
...

Oh,
you're
awake.

well
...

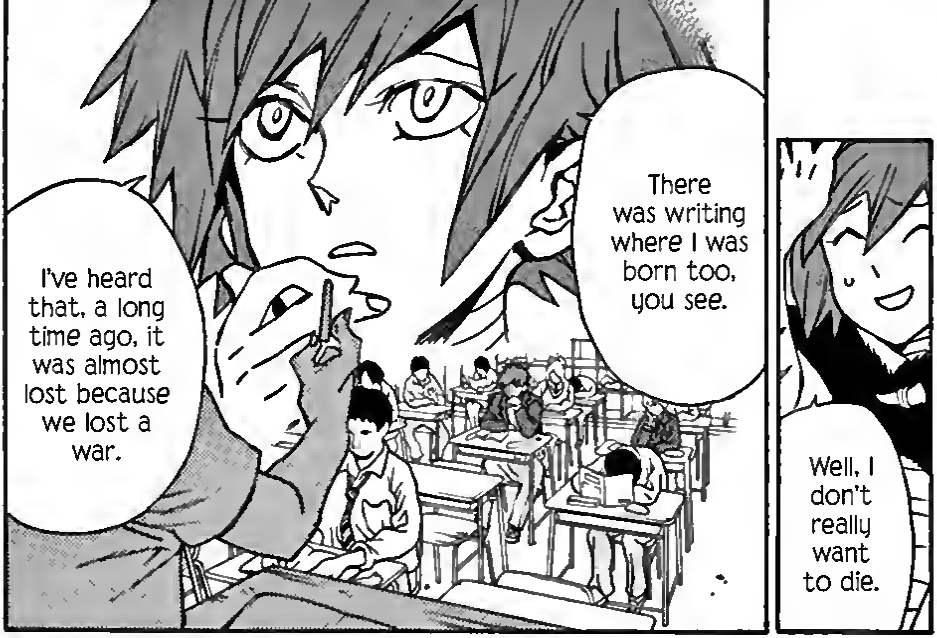
メキッ
13
Chinese roses...
None of them are blooming.
That way you get to watch them bloom.
ドサッ
These are...

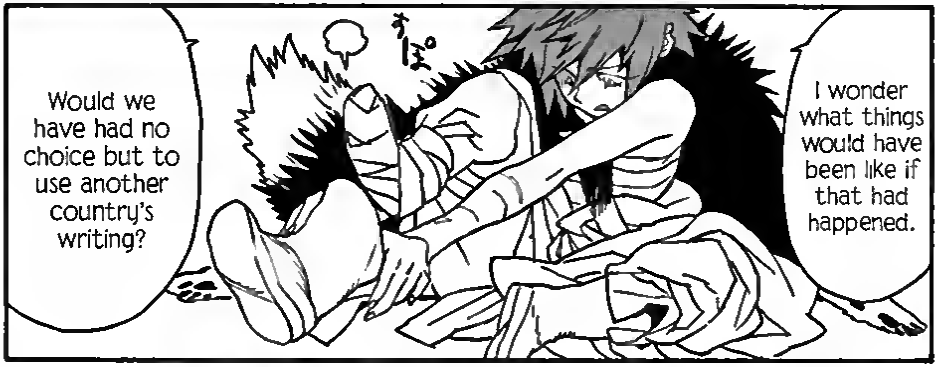
...You're quite merry.
As if cut buds bloom.
Much obliged...
I wanted to thank you, but I don't have anything, so... well...
He might be alive.
It's my friend.

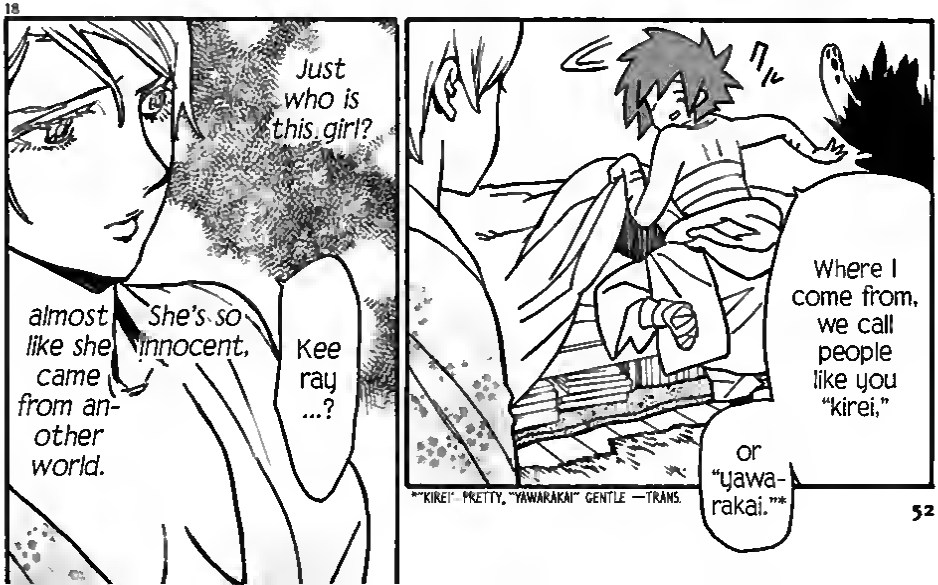
thank you.
I see. Shut Hell's dear "false prince," Yurui...
Vero-nika,
LIAOYANG
WESTERN XIA
ZHONGDU
XINGQING
YAIYUAN
JIN
LANZHOU
JINGZHAO
CHENGDU
SOUTHERN SONG
My – Shut Hell's – being here
must be really dangerous for you, too.
I'll leave as soon as I find a safe road.
The place he – we – were heading for.
If he's alive, that's where he'll be going.
Do you have any idea where to go?
...Your friend *might* be alive.

I'll go to Chengdu.
I'm sure I'll meet him there.

I won't stop you... "Sudoh."
but if your "friend" Yurul is alive,
17
...Wherever Yurul goes, the Mongols will follow.
Because of his involvement with those letters.
Did you know Yurul, Veronika?
She knows my name? More importantly...
Sudoh, if you aren't the Tangut bandit "Shut Hell,"
then there's no sense dying with Yurul for the sake of the Tangut script.


I've heard that, a long time ago, it was almost lost because we lost a war.
There was writing where I was born too, you see.
Well, I don't really want to die.


Would we have had no choice but to use another country's writing?
I wonder what things would have been like if that had happened.


Just who is this girl?
She's so innocent, almost like she came from another world.
Kee ray ...?
Where I come from, we call people like you "kirei," or "yawarakai."**
**"KIREI" PRETTY, "YAWARAKAI" GENTLE —TRANS.

I'm not just remembering her...
Shakira.
Everyone speaks and writes and sings and argues...
No one wants the words they use for all of that taken away.
19
Back then,
when I could just live, believing in someone...
—narr!
Huh?
"Fool."
I meant myself.

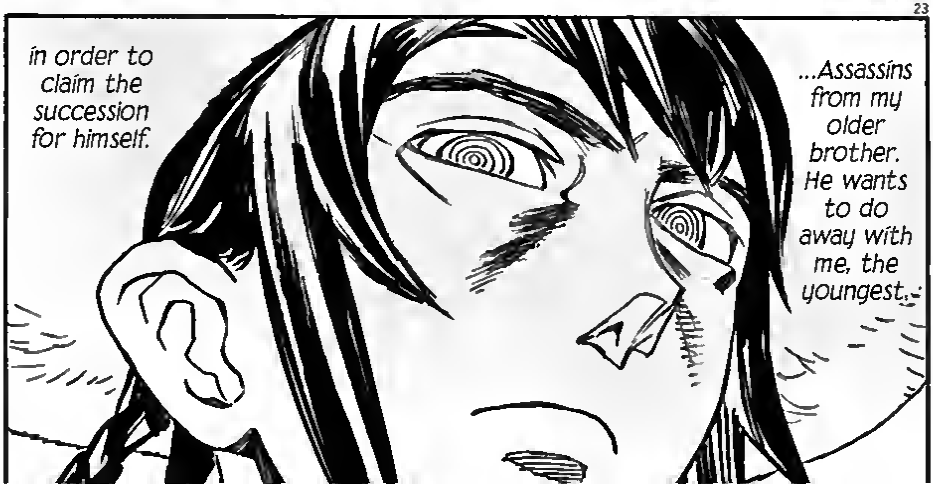
20
Nothing but past and hate.
My life is already over.
Witch!
Cleanse her with fire!
I could never forget.
...I've been living only for the past,
nourished by my long hatred.

...It's best if those flowers don't bloom.
I cannot allow that girl to steal my heart any more than she already has.
That's important.
until after she's gone.
21
...I mustn't taste any more of these feelings I've missed.

I never imagined just eating and drinking would take us till the dead of night.
It was a conference with the Khitan in name only.

The new moon is near, and the way is dark. Tread carefully.

Prince Tolui!
Prepare yourself,


...Assassins from my older brother. He wants to do away with me, the youngest,
in order to claim the succession for himself.

Not good enough. Laying low in small numbers so as not to stand out backfired on them.

taking such tiresome matters on himself all this time.
...Nalan must have been
And even Nalan
failed to repay the Mongols' trust.

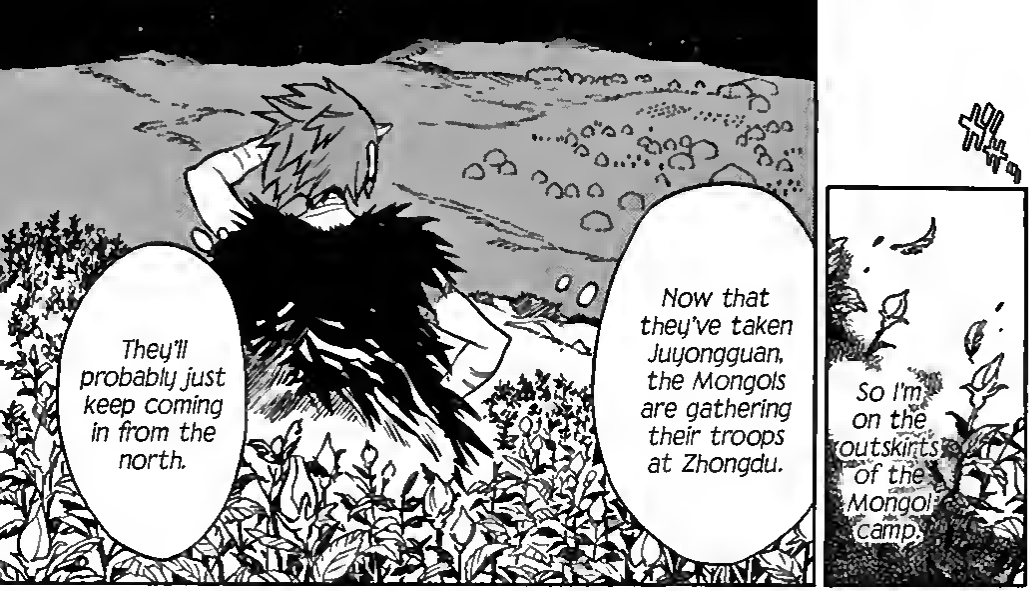
I, Tolui, am the protector of the Mongol hearth.
I live only for the Mongols' sake.
Go back and tell my brother
I will give him the kingship.
...So, my elder brothers still lack faith in me.

Lord Tolui!?
crash
clatter
Veronika.

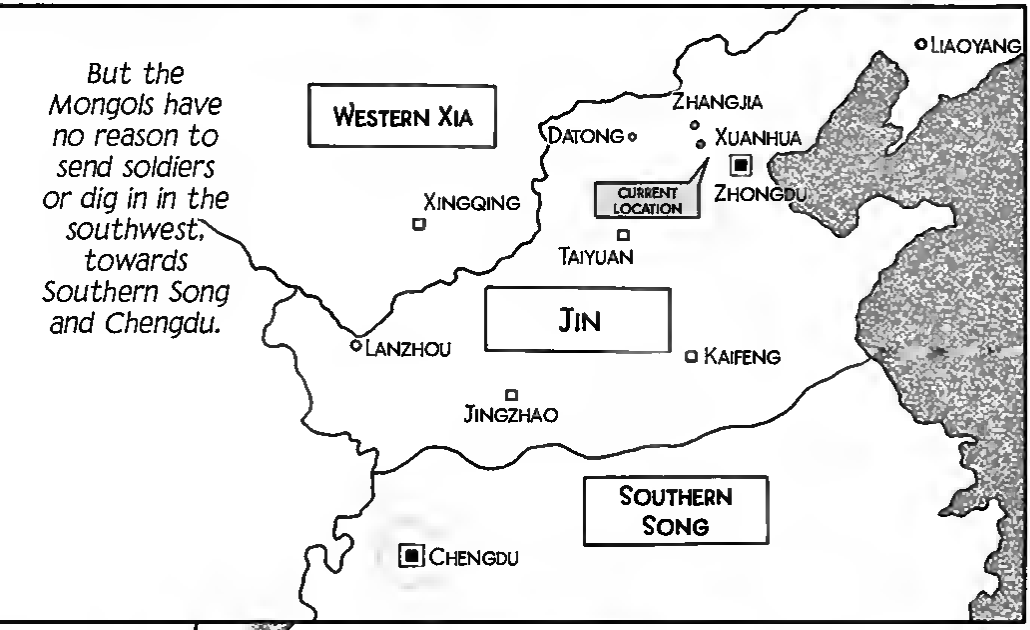
...Ah ...
Did Nalan give it to you?
I didn't want to find it.
this...
is the Voice of Jade, isn't it?
ドン

I've never seen such beauty.
It's because she's frightened... of me.
...Please don't say anything.
My pulse is fast.
I want to at least believe in you.
At least you.

...You must have some reason
for holding onto it, and not giving it to father at once.
You probably need to prepare something first.
The night of the new moon will come again.
When it does, I want you
to hand it over to me.
The night of the new moon, Veronika.
...Please don't get any funny ideas.


They'll probably just keep coming in from the north.
Now that they've taken Juyongguan, the Mongols are gathering their troops at Zhongdu.

So I'm on the outskirts of the Mongol camp.

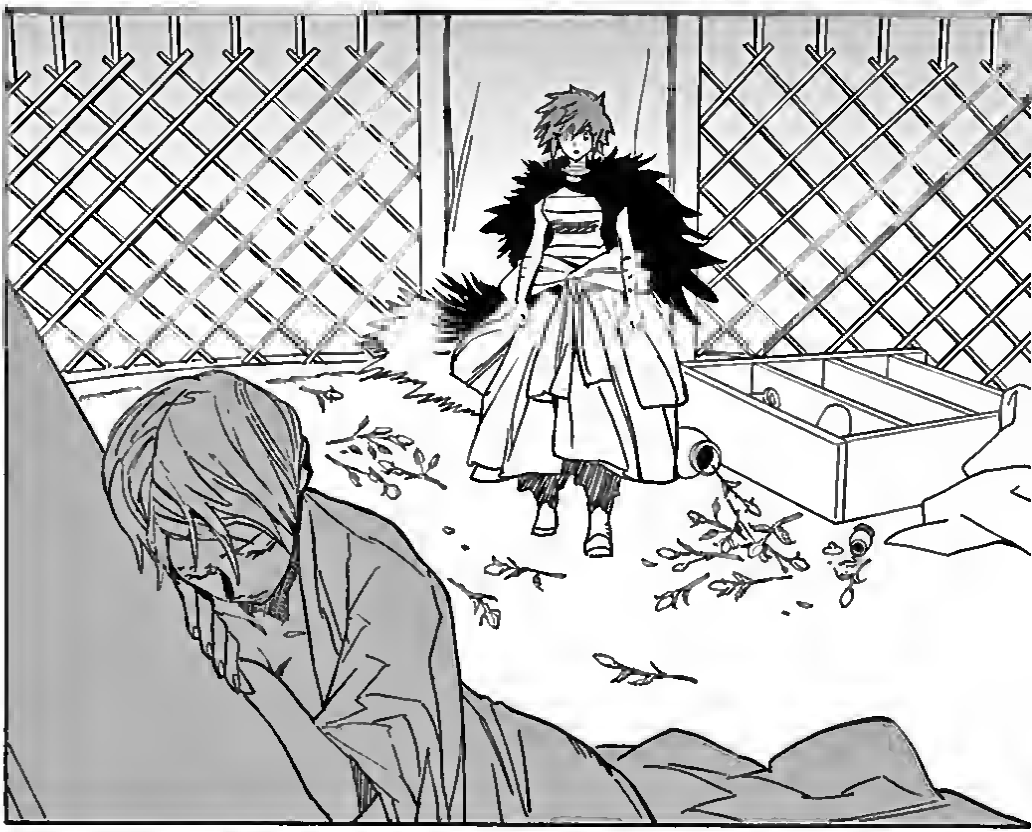

But the Mongols have no reason to send soldiers or dig in in the southwest, towards Southern Song and Chengdu.
WESTERN XIA
LIAOYANG
ZHANGJIA
DATONG
XUANHUA
ZHONGDU
CURRENT LOCATION
XINGQING
TAIYUAN
JIN
LANZHOU
KAIFENG
JINGZHAO
SOUTHERN SONG
CHENGDU

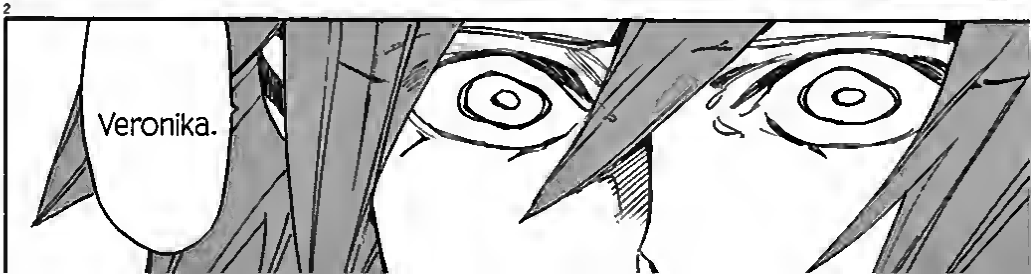
31
I'll leave on a dark night.
And the moon is, thankfully, waning.
There's not much risk of getting caught on the way.

I'll set out on the night of the new moon.
For Chengdu!

[Chapter LXXVI]
The New Moon

If I'd been in there just now,
Veronika would have been in danger...
...He doesn't look like a regular soldier.

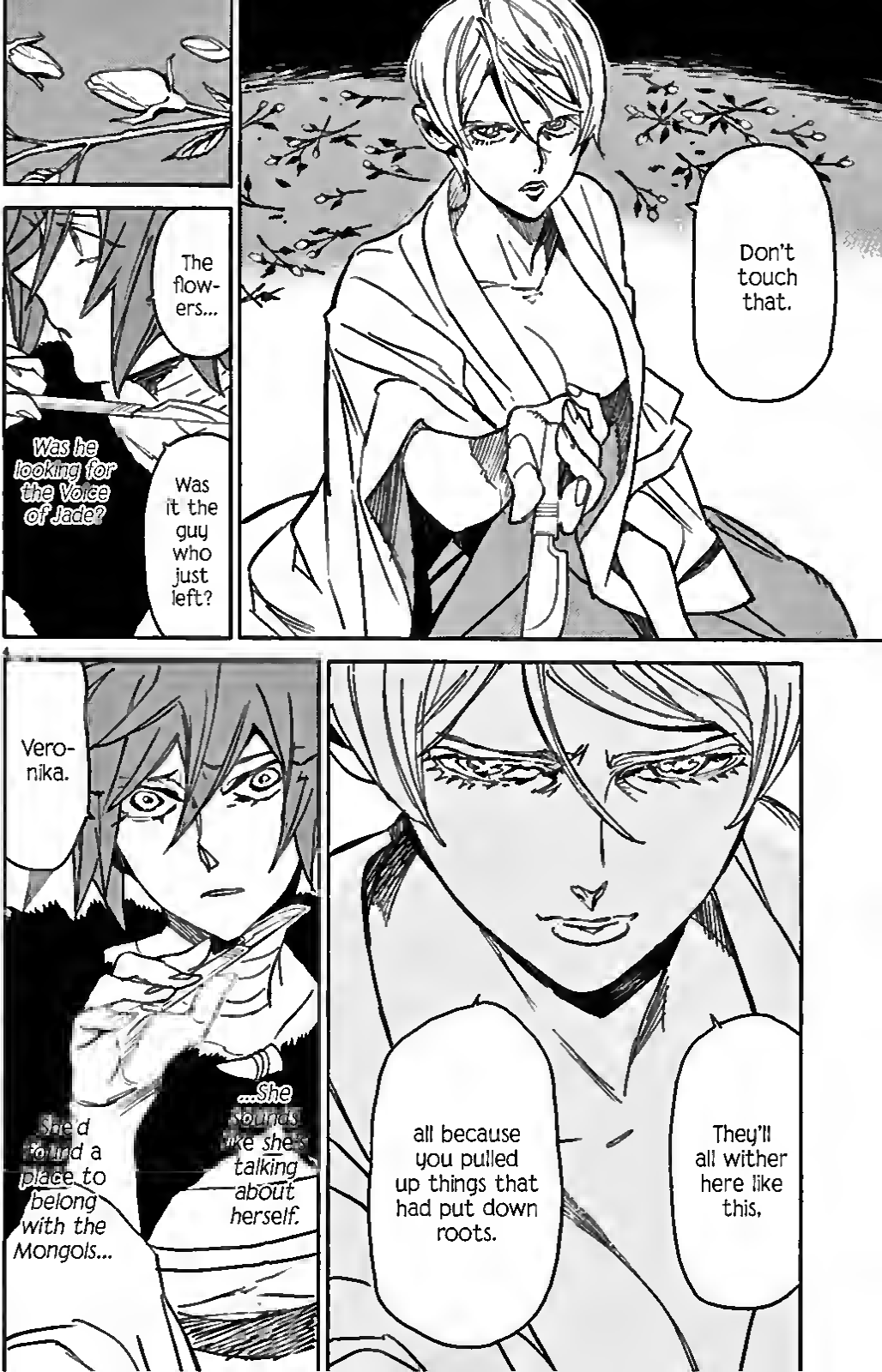



Veronika.

Is that...
The Voice of Jade...?

I'm so glad!
When I wasn't able to get it back,
I was sure it was already smashed.

Yurui, your treasure
is still alive.


Don't touch that.
The flow-ers...
Was it the guy who just left?
Was he looking for the Voice of Jade?
Vero-nika.
...She sounds like she's talking about herself.
She'd found a place to belong with the Mongols...
all because you pulled up things that had put down roots.
They'll all wither here like this,

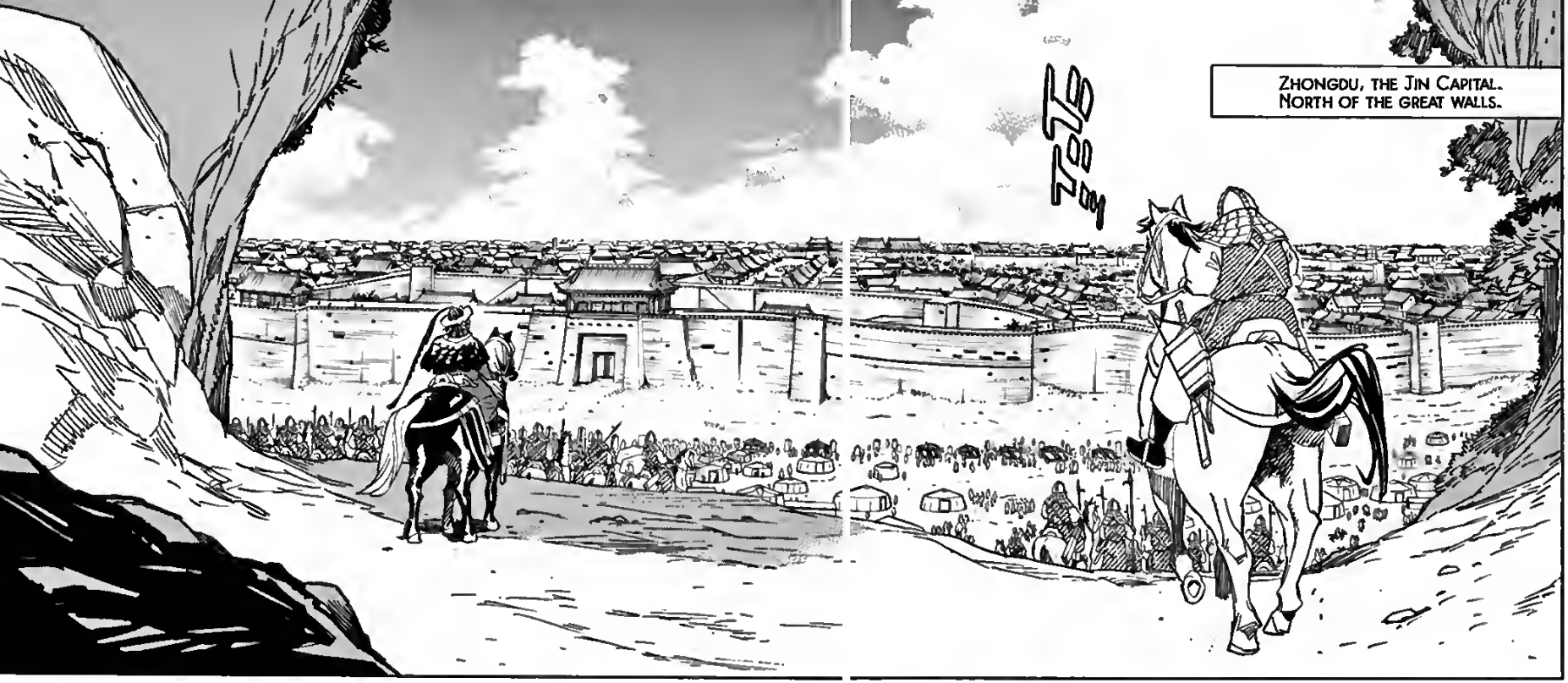
I want the Voice of Jade.
I can't let it be destroyed.
smack
...But
Even though it was dangerous.
and yet she let me stay here.
Tangut bandit, "Shut Hell," if I hand it over to you, it would mean betraying the Mongols.
Lord Tolui... already suspects me.
If I do that, I'm as good as dead.
In that case...
why don't you come with me?
Leave here, and–

Ridicu-
lous.
If you
want this,
you'll have
to kill me
and take it.
Ow...
You can,
can't you,
"Shut
Hell"?

I told you before: women like us go on killing and burning only to get killed in the end ourselves.
Women like you and me go on killing and burning only to get killed in the end once we've had our fill.
Veronika.
I'd forgotten that myself... No, I tried to forget it.
there's no way I could do that.
Because of her kind voice and gaze.

I was the fool.
chasing after your dead friend.
Go wind up in a ditch in Chengdu or wherever you like,
I won't let anyone know where "Shut Hell" is going, either.
Leave. I won't chase you.
But I won't hand over the Voice of Jade.

...Vero-
nika,
I need
the Voice
of Jade.


ZHONGDU, THE JIN CAPITAL.
NORTH OF THE GREAT WALLS.

No soldiers have been harmed, but...
It seems she's been targetting wagons carrying provisions for men and horses.

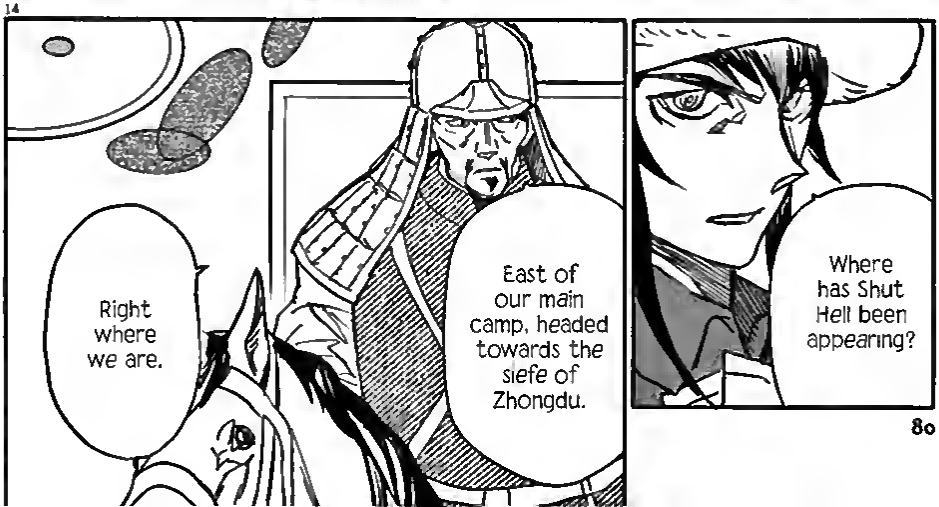
11
A woman bandit who calls herself Shut Hell.
Yes, your highness.
You're sure?

10
"Shut Hell" has appeared?

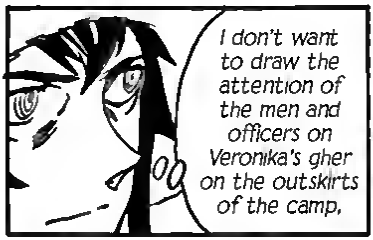
No, I'm...
They must be working for the Jin.
Our precious supplies...!
Curses!
..."Shut Hell."

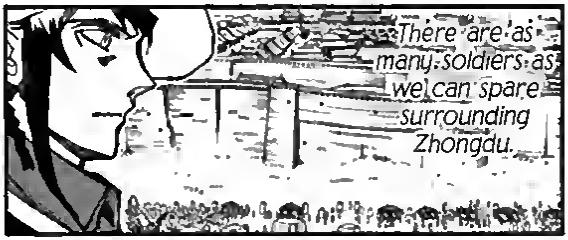
How is the great Khan's tent in the main camp defended?
It's an expedition against the enemy capitol. Security is always tight.
Is she still trying to target father during our war with the Jin?
"Shut Hell." So she was lucky enough to escape that place alive.

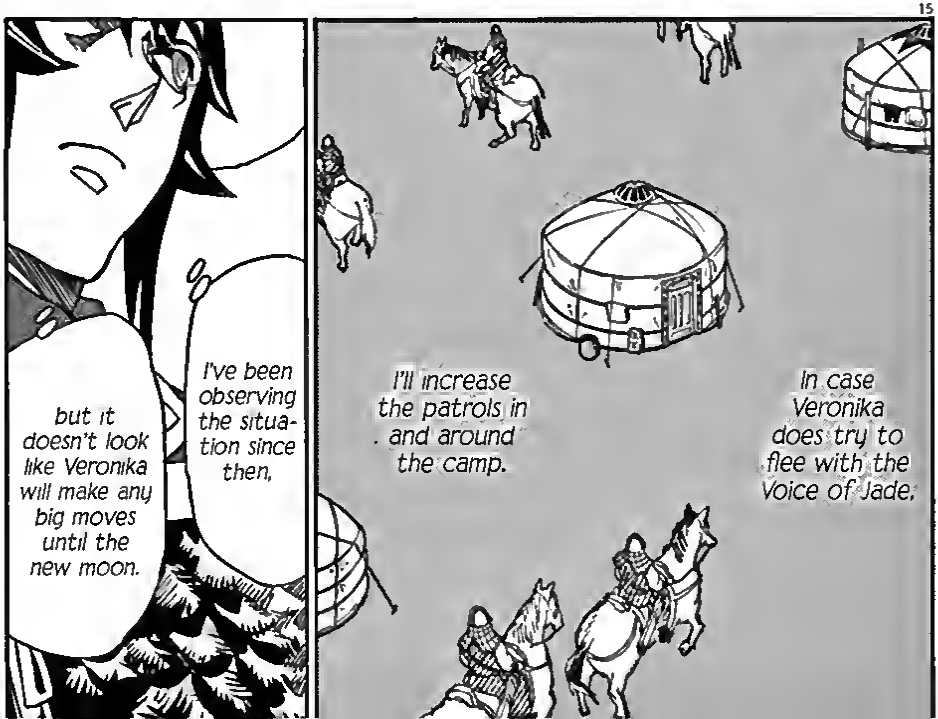
And there's no chaos for her to exploit, like there was at Juyongguan.
Even if Shut Hell bodes as ill as her name implies, there's nothing a lone bandit can do.


Right where we are.
East of our main camp, headed towards the siefe of Zhongdu.
Where has Shut Hell been appearing?

If Shut Hell is after the Great Khan, could she be aiming
for his entrance when Zhongdu falls, rather than his pavilion in the camp...?


I don't want to draw the attention of the men and officers on Veronika's gher on the outskirts of the camp,


There are as many soldiers as we can spare surrounding Zhongdu.


but it doesn't look like Veronika will make any big moves until the new moon.
I've been observing the situation since then,
I'll increase the patrols in and around the camp.
In case Veronika does try to flee with the Voice of Jade,

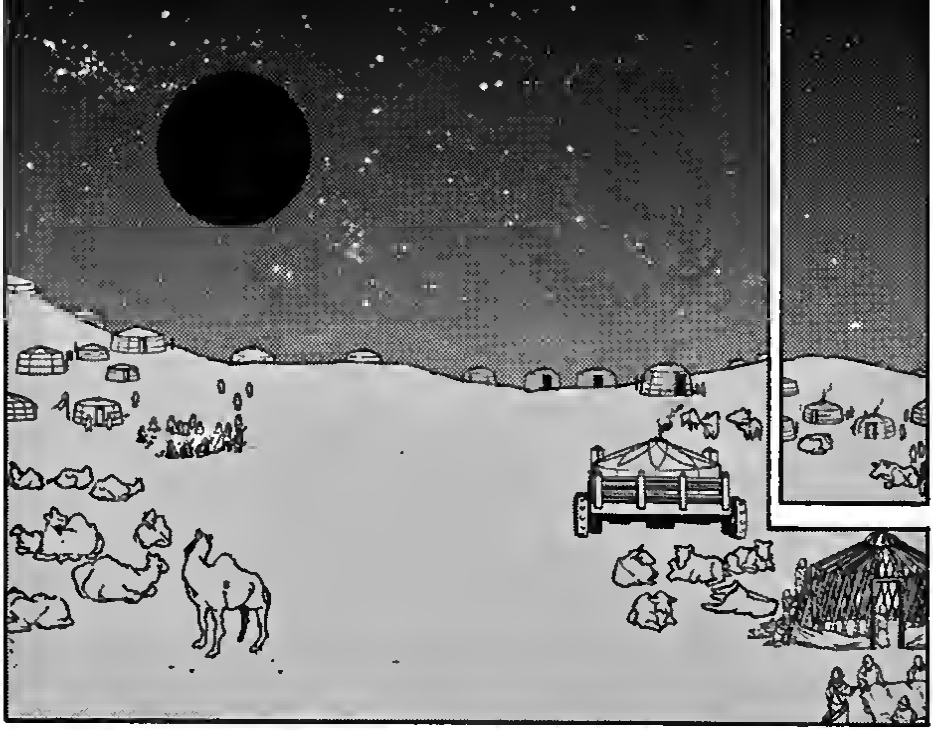
Nalan is gone now. She won't do anything without support.
Even if she was involved in Nalan's plot,

Veronika.

Yes, high-ness.

Move security from the west outskirts of the main camp to the east side.
Either way, I won't allow myself to be seen calling at Veronika's tent
until I return on the night of the new moon.

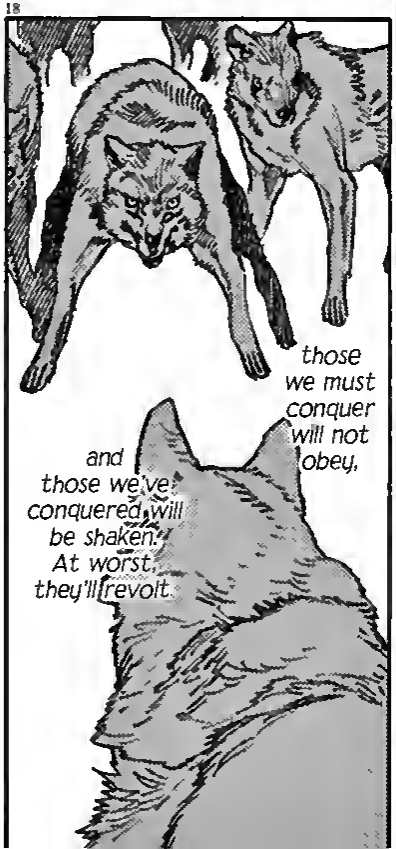
Even our own soldiers must not be allowed to know of the Voice of Jade...



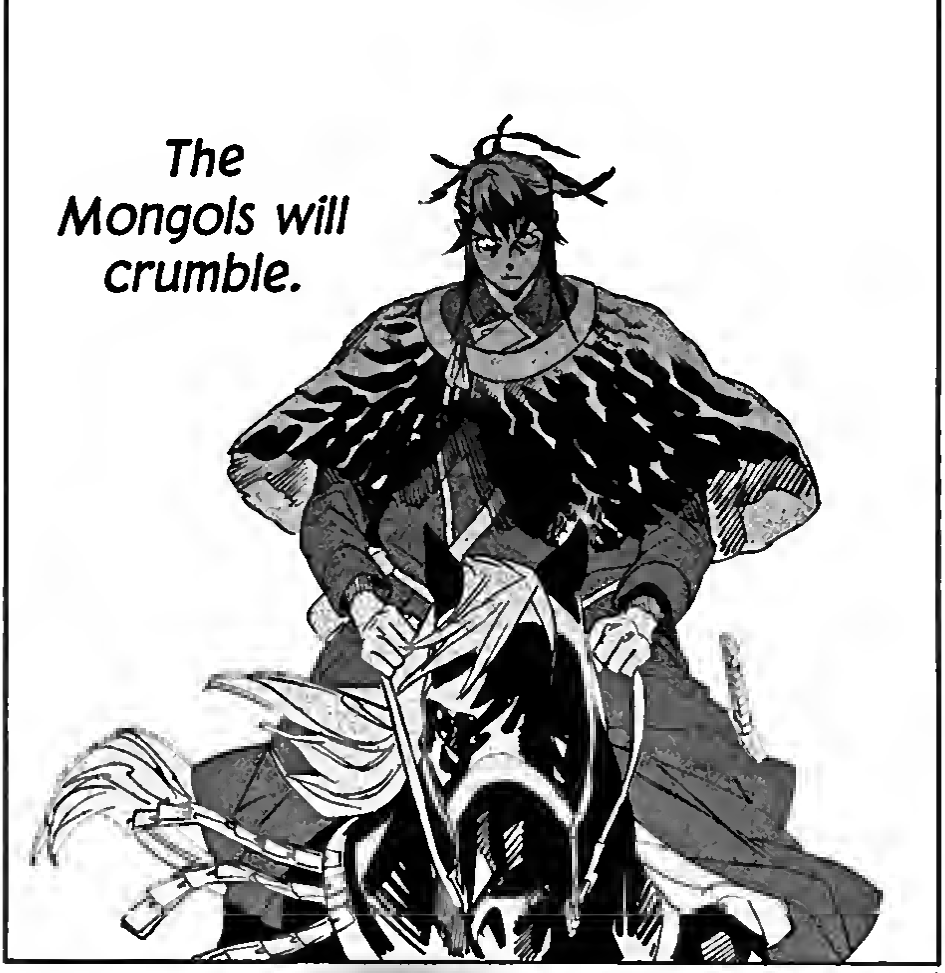
The new moon. The promised night...

if it became known that the Great Khan of the Mongols
had his back defiled by Tangut letters,

Father – our first Great Khan – welded many tribes together to create the Mongols.
Now, we must subdue the Khitan in the northeast, to conquer the Jin, and later we must subdue the Jurchen Jin as well.


those we must conquer will not obey,
and those we've conquered will be shaken. At worst, they'll revolt.

At a time like this,


The Mongols will crumble.

The Great Khans of the Mongols – not only father – must always be feared.
We Mongols consume other countries, other peoples, to remain strong and young.

Surely you do not wish for that, Veronika...

The Voice of Jade must be smashed to dust.
That's why the Tangut script must be eradicated,
by the Great Khan's own hands.

It's almost time.

When Lord Tolui calls,
I'm pre-pared.

for not handing over the Voice of Jade at once.
I'll probably be hauled before my lord and cut down
They're weakened, with their roots cut off, but I at least cut them short.
so, that water will still reach the buds.
"To Sudoh." I never gave it to her...
21

Lord Tolui...
Am I hoping they'll bloom?
That girl is already long gone.

Keep quiet.
!
25
24
I'm kidnapping you, Veronika.
Sorry.

Vero-
nika...?

She cut the string of my bow-sling.
!
skid
This guy's light on his feet...
And he's not flustered, even though I took him by surprise.

Whinney

Don't follow me.
unless you want this woman dead.

...”Shut Hell.”

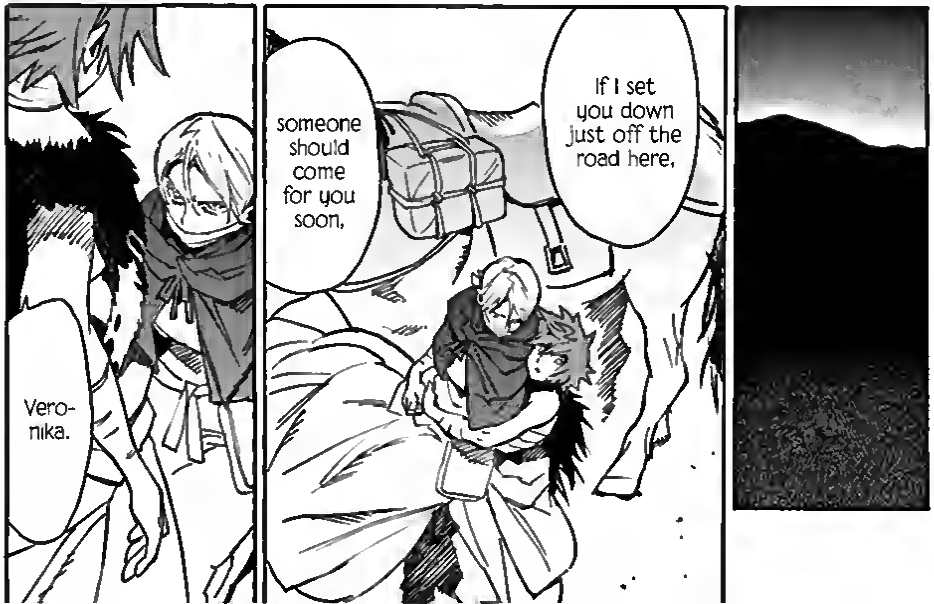
[Chapter LXXVII] One Flower

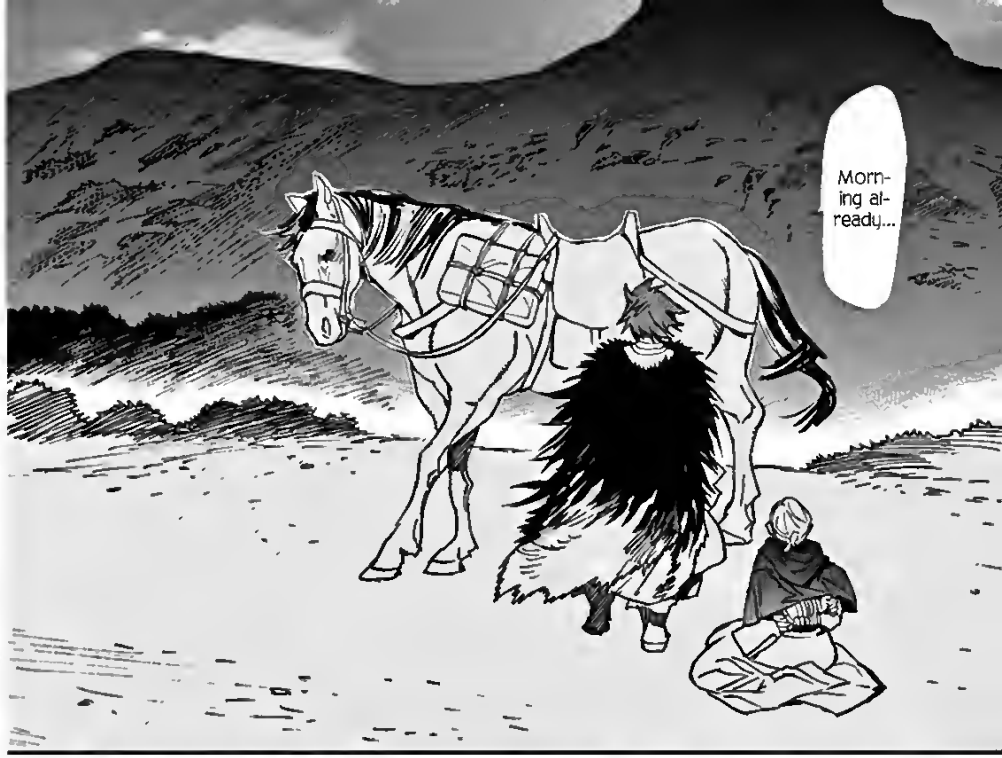
3
2
The flowers...

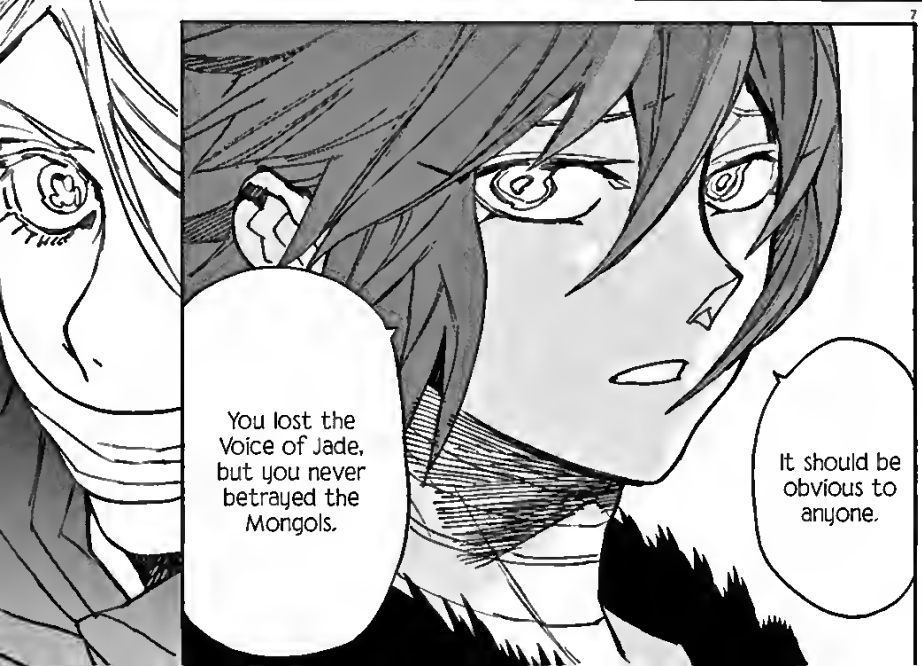
Good.
It looks like we'll be able to take the Voice of Jade straight to Chengdu, without anything getting in our way.
At least for a while.

And I showed up there too, plotting the assassination of their big boss.
The Mongols concentrated all the forces they could at Zhongdu.
They must be working for the Jin.
Curses!
Our precious supplies...!
No, I'm...

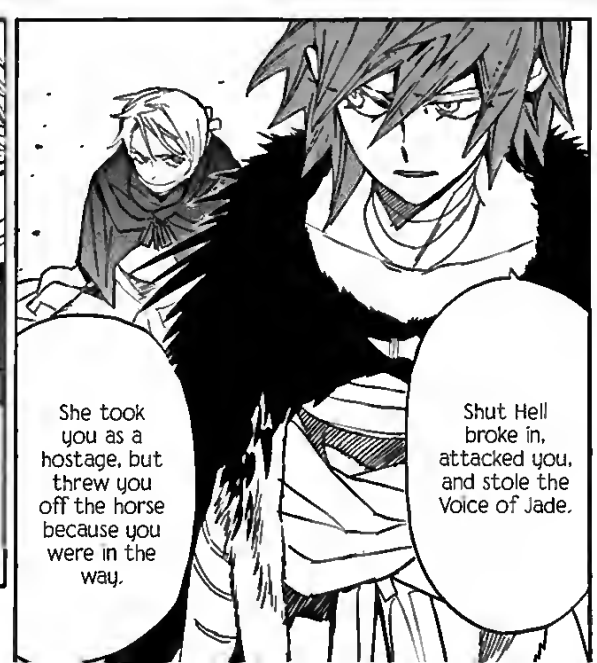
to guard the way west, away from Zhongdu.
It looks like they couldn't spare the soldiers


Vero-nika.
someone should come for you soon,
If I set you down just off the road here,


Morning already...


You lost the Voice of Jade, but you never betrayed the Mongols.
It should be obvious to anyone.

.....


She took you as a hostage, but threw you off the horse because you were in the way.
Shut Hell broke in, attacked you, and stole the Voice of Jade.

I've said sorry too many times already.
I doubt you'll forgive me now.
Still...
If I tried to give you a last kiss, would you bite me?
Thought so...
Oh, well.

Veroni-
ka, you
told me
that you and
Shut Hell would
be killed yourselves
once you were done
killing and burning.
That that
was all.

But that wasn't all, was it?
I slept with you and I got my energy back.
And you,

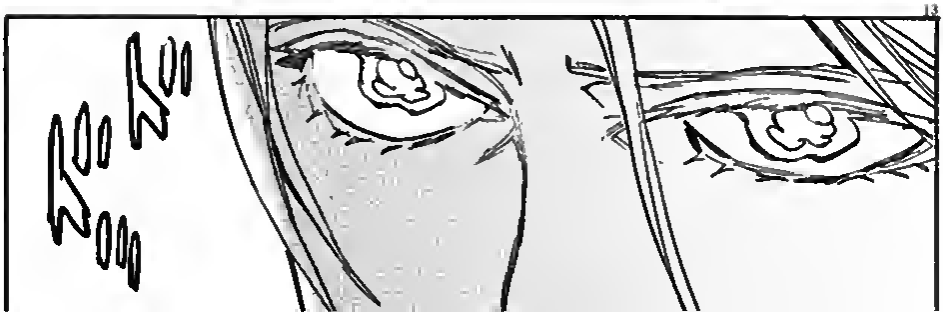
you healed me – Shut Hell – many times.
Many times.

...Is there anything you want to say before I go?
Like, "Fool," or, "Die," or something?

...I've got something for you here.
This is...
from Yurul...
To Sudoh...
Thank you!
When did–
!

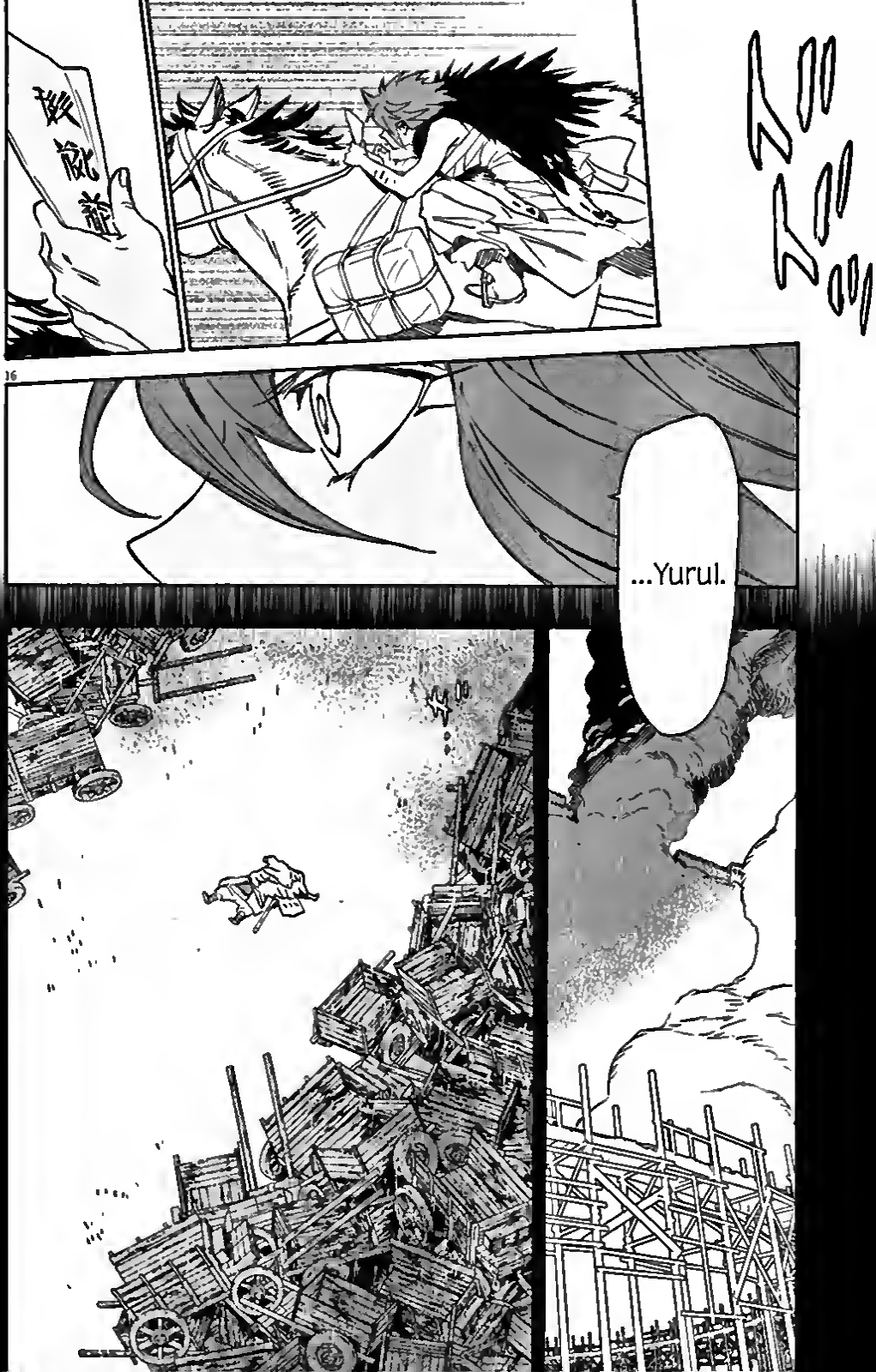
I'll chase you.

Don't.



For a long time,
my heart was like stone,
but it looks like you've lit a new fire in it.

Lady Veronika, are you unharmed?
The thief is close; after her!
The heat feels pleasant...
...Even if it is a little like going soft.
Could this be hate?


...Yurul.

Haa...
Haa...
Yaraltu...
Ugh...

...slave of the Tangut...

Take the pain, the wound, into your own body.
Take it along with the Tangut letters...
Can you still go on dreaming the same dream,
Yurul?
Or will you hate? Hate me?
Or hate the Tangut, as I do?

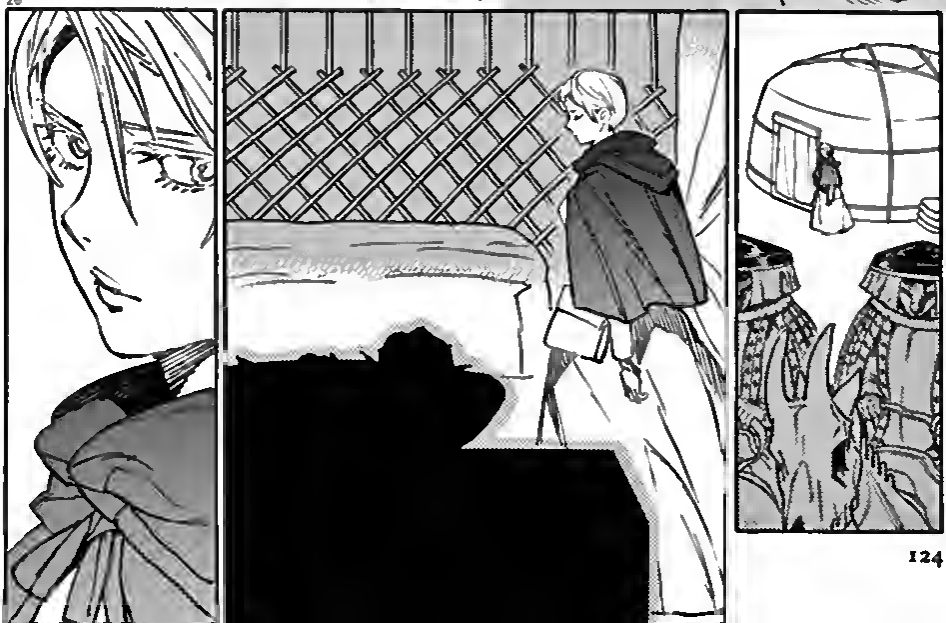
I want to see the color of your flame.
Burn with the same fever as myself.
Will it be for me, for them, or for something else? Either way, you will burn.
23
Lady Veronika has...
We bring news, Great Khan!

24
You were not harmed then... Veronika?
...No.

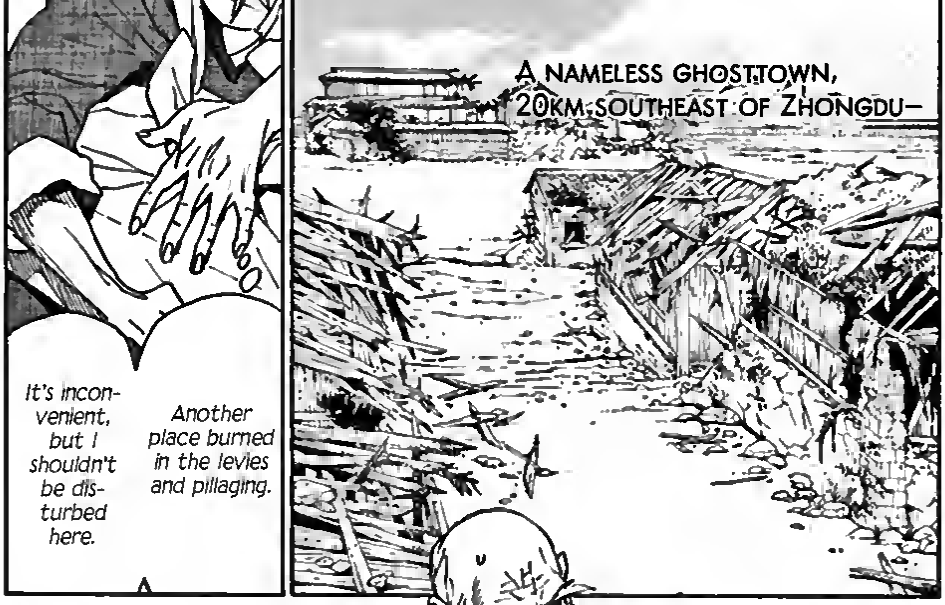
.....
How-
ever...
Do not
fret. What
has been
stolen,
The
Voice of
Jade,

I will
take
back
I know
where
the thief
is going.

Please, take me with you.
I want to repay that bandit —
"Shut Hell" — with my own hands.

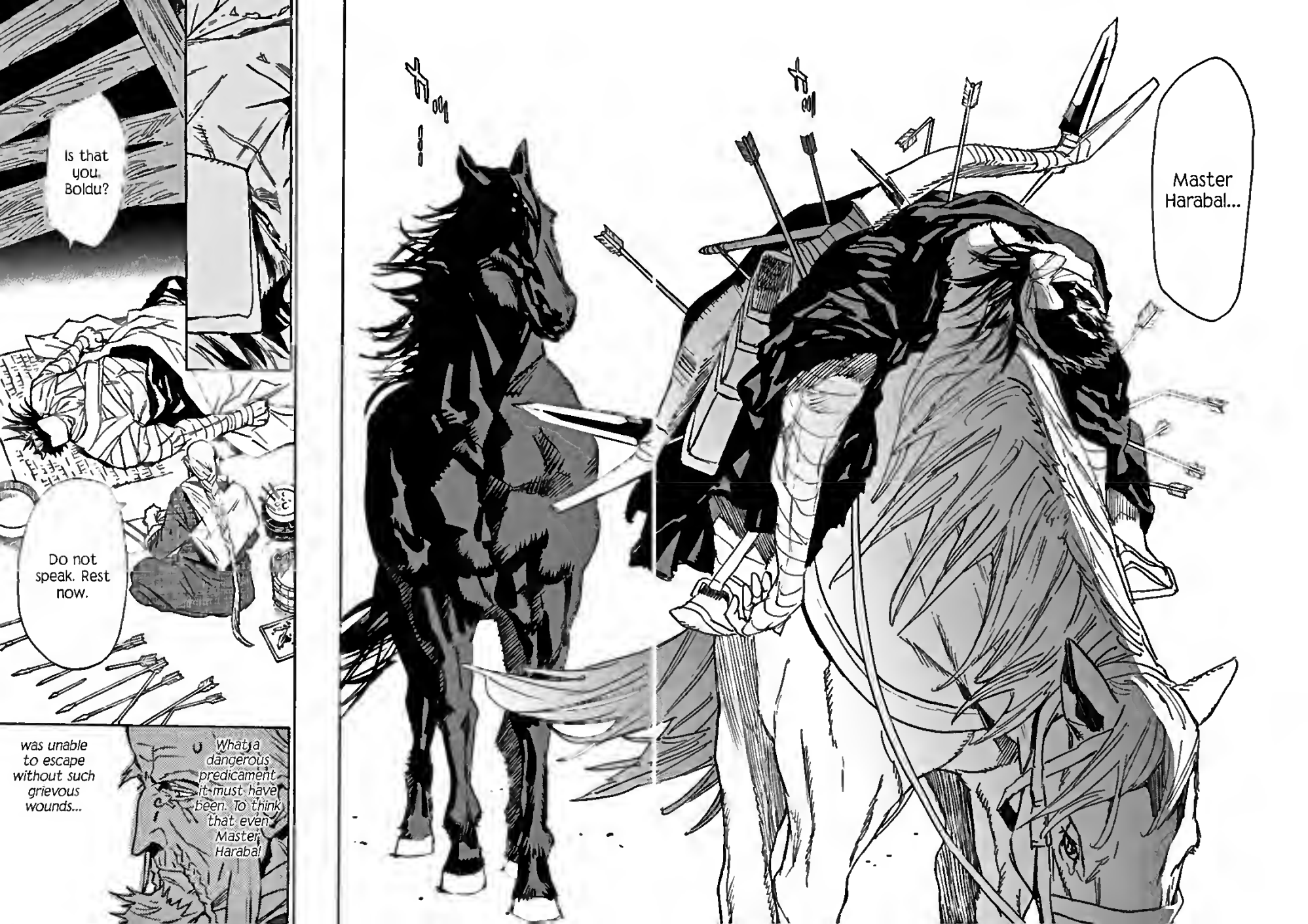


Heh...
...It bloomed.
27
Hee hee.
Just one bloomed.
Hehe he...
Ahaha,
Ah ha ha...


It's inconvenient, but I shouldn't be disturbed here.
Another place burned in the levies and pillaging.
A NAMELESS GHOST TOWN, 20KM SOUTHEAST OF ZHONGDU—

and Master Yurul safe?
Are the other half of the Voice of Jade,

tap
Shut Hell?
How long must I wait—


Is that you, Boldu?
Do not speak. Rest now.
was unable to escape without such grievous wounds...
What a dangerous predicament it must have been. To think that even Master Haraba!
Master Harabal...

Dead.
How is he!?
Yurui...

Do not speak...

[Chapter LXXVIII] Spies

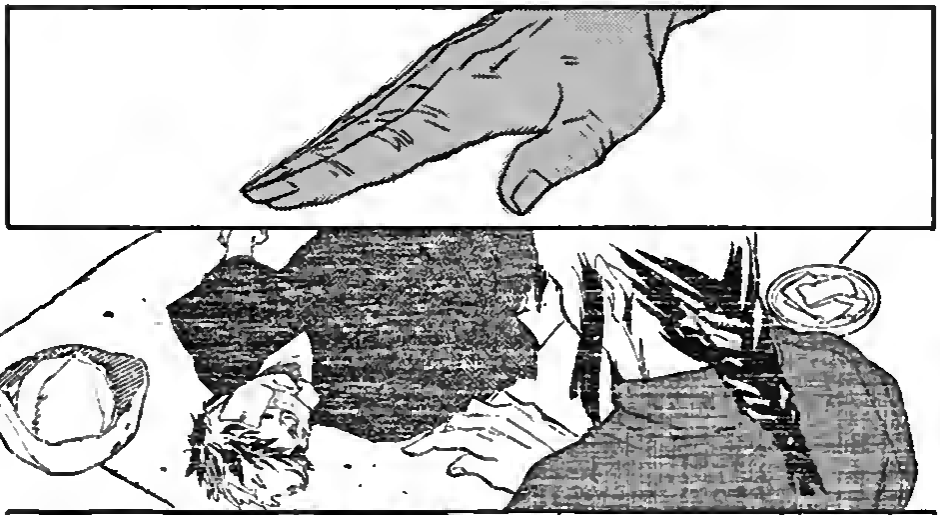
Don't let your guards down.
It's possible we might run into Jin reinforcements heading north to Zhongdu.
If we keep heading south, we'll be entering territory where the Jin presence is strong.
It's the Black Tiger. Shoot him.
Your high-ness...!

He's out of arrows, but he's still dangerous. Keep your distance
Cut off his retreat and shoot him dead
So... Harabal really is here.
Yes, high-ness...
Hurry.
search this place for the corpse of a boy.
Once the Black Tiger is dead,
The corpse of... a boy?

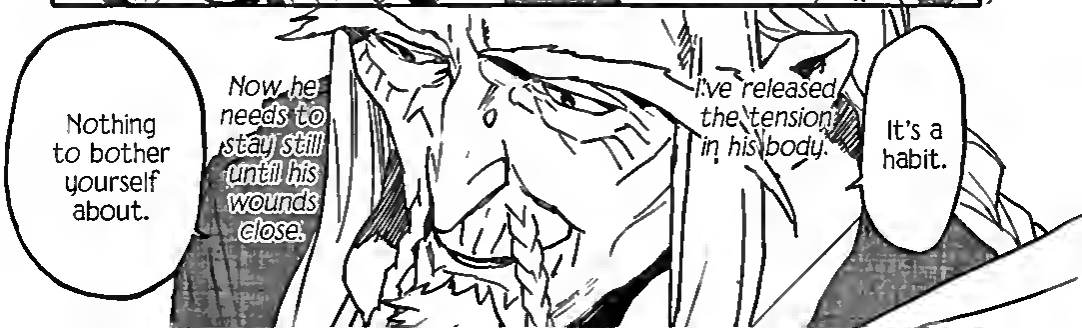
If, by some chance, he isn't dead, capture him and bring him back with us.
He will be poison to the Mongols
I'm going to kill him myself before that happens.
...What does this boy look like?
He looks like me.
An illegitimate child.
Yurul of the Tsog...
Harabal's brother!

Hara-
bal!
Have you drawn your bow against the Great Khan...!?

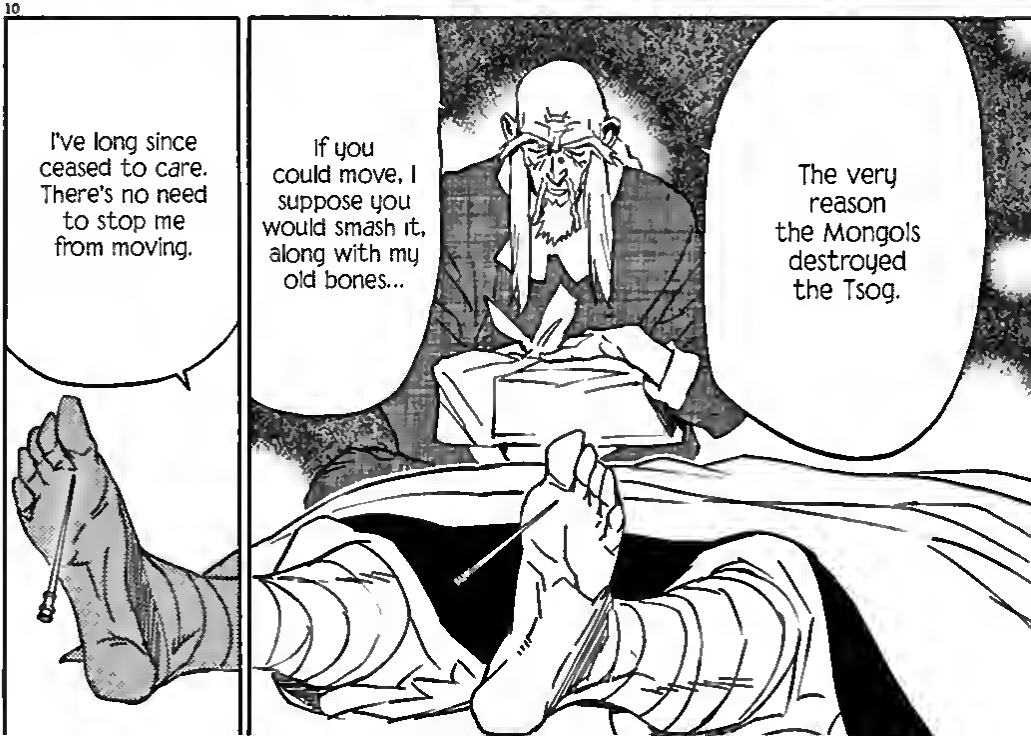
We've searched a whole day and night and haven't found him.
I can't imagine he could get far with his wounds.
Harabal fled south.
Commander.
Did he have a bolthole ready...?
The road.
That's...



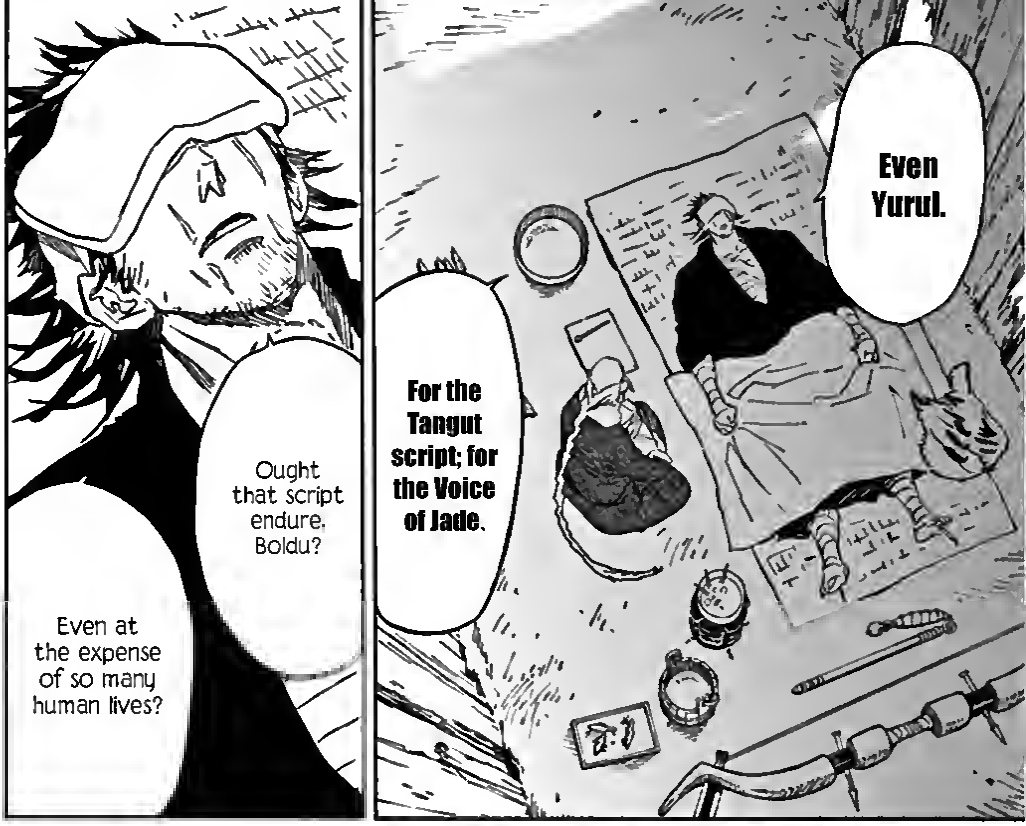
What good will helping me do you?


Nothing to bother yourself about.
Now he needs to stay still until his wounds close.
I've released the tension in his body.
It's a habit.

Is that the Voice of Jade?
Yes.
The 5,886 Tangut characters, but only half.
The other half...
Is it still in that man's hands ...?


The very reason the Mongols destroyed the Tsog.
If you could move, I suppose you would smash it, along with my old bones...
I've long since ceased to care. There's no need to stop me from moving.

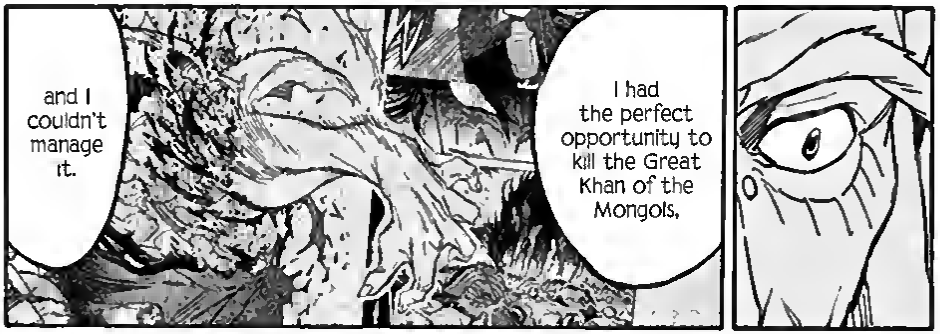
No... Those needles are to help you rest.
Now stay quiet a while.
You hid the Voice of Jade among the Tsog, and then you left...
I never asked you, Boldu.
How did it feel to deceive us for decades?
The one who brought the Voice of Jade to us, Ifa... My mother soon fell ill and died in an unfamiliar land.
I suppose Gulshan, the director of the Great Academy, was Ifa's father. He died by my hand.
All the Tsog were killed.
So he did know.


Even Yurul.
For the Tangut script; for the Voice of Jade.
Ought that script endure, Boldu?
Even at the expense of so many human lives?

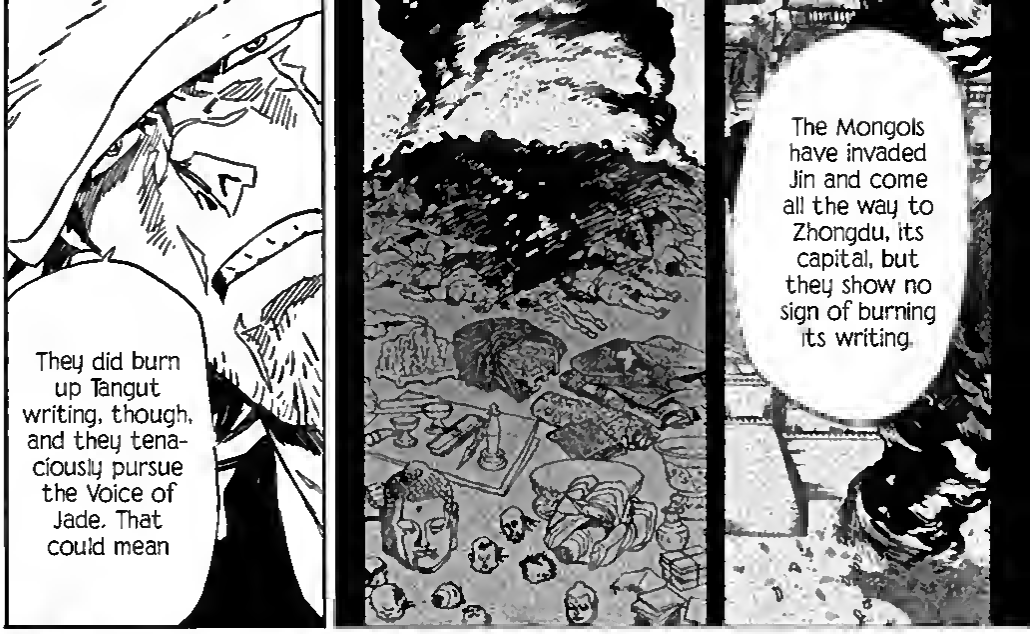
You were buried among the Tsog as a spy.
You lived with us,
but you grew old for the Voice of Jade. You expended your life, too...

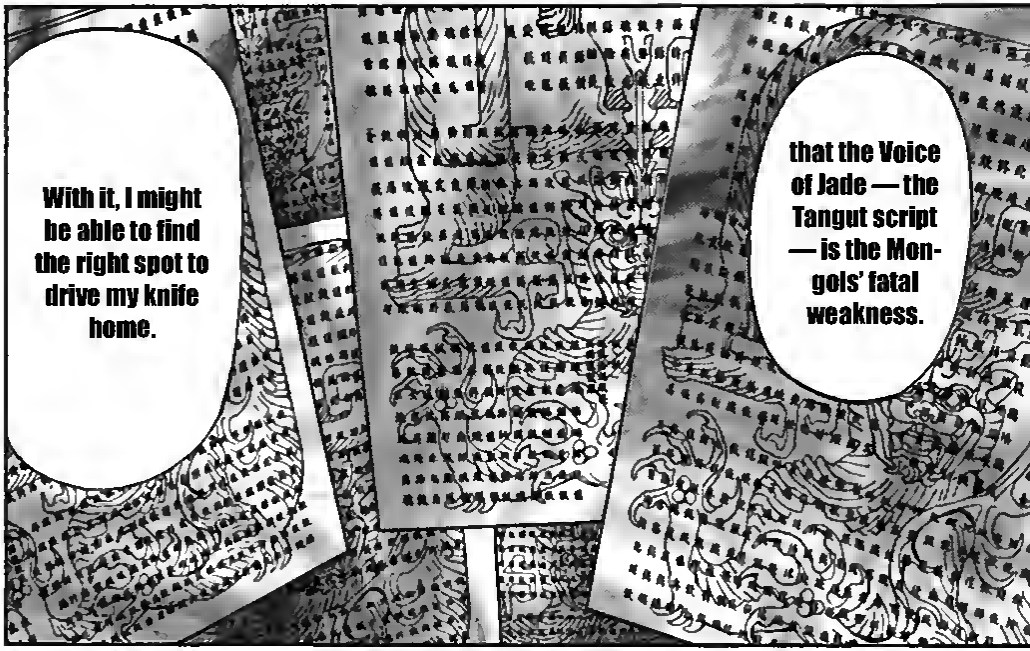
Even that should be over soon.
Whether or not the other half returns,
with Master Yurul dead, everything is over...
But

I will not allow the Voice of Jade to meet its doom.

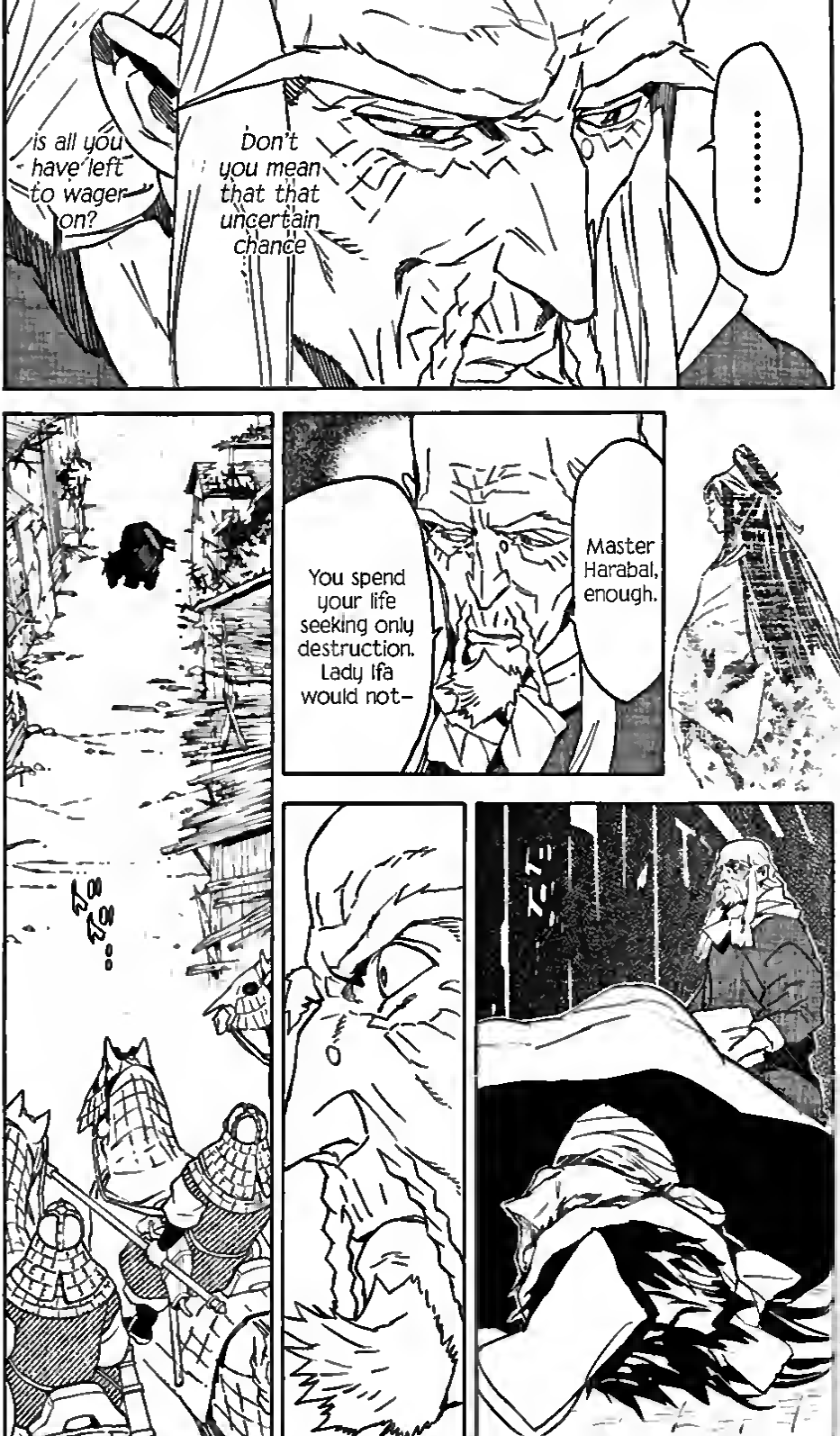

and I couldn't manage it.
I had the perfect opportunity to kill the Great Khan of the Mongols,

and the Voice of Jade could be the fangs I need to do it.
But I can kill the Mongols he built,


They did burn up Tangut writing, though, and they tenaciously pursue the Voice of Jade. That could mean
The Mongols have invaded Jin and come all the way to Zhongdu, its capital, but they show no sign of burning its writing.

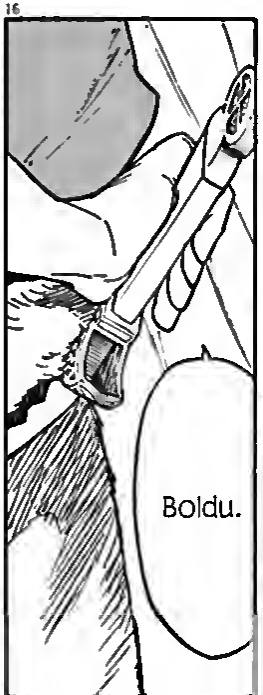

With it, I might be able to find the right spot to drive my knife home.
that the Voice of Jade — the Tangut script — is the Mongols' fatal weakness.

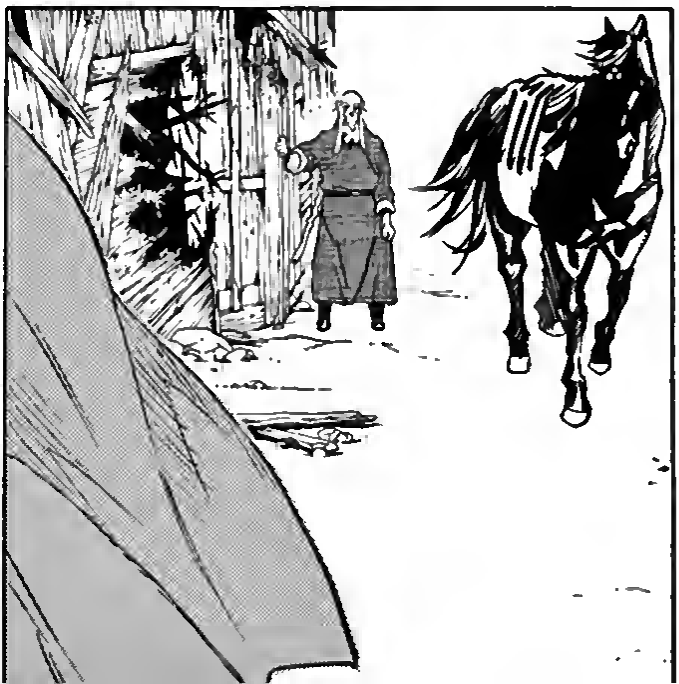
It's at least worth gambling on.
grind


Don't you mean that that uncertain chance
is all you have left to wager on?
.....
Master Harabal, enough.
You spend your life seeking only destruction. Lady Ifa would not–
Do-
Zz-

I'll need you
to prove what you said.

Harabal's black horse...


Boldu.



Give me the Voice of Jade.
.....

...Harabal's former unit.
Yurul, isn't it?
It's this way.
Perhaps he's hidden himself somewhere along the road.
There's no way through.
If you're looking for Harabal, at least

He blocked the road to throw you off his track.
These large hoofprints have a protrusion on the left forehoof
They belong to Harabal's black horse,
Find an alternate route and keep on this way.
and they continue past the fallen trees
I'm going to take a tiger's head.

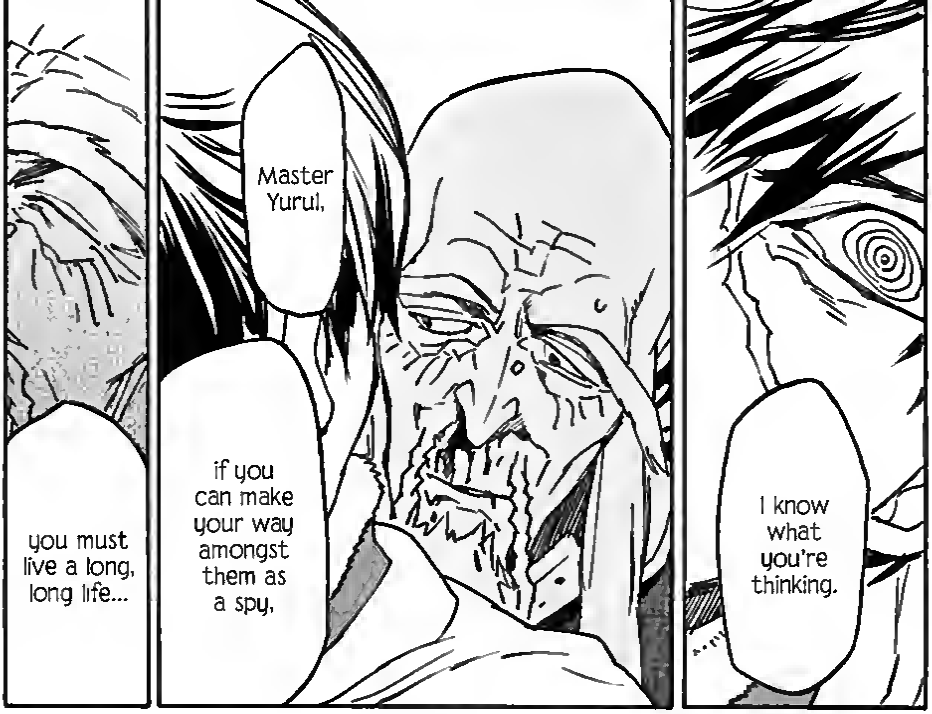
And one more — a souvenir
for your masters.
That's...

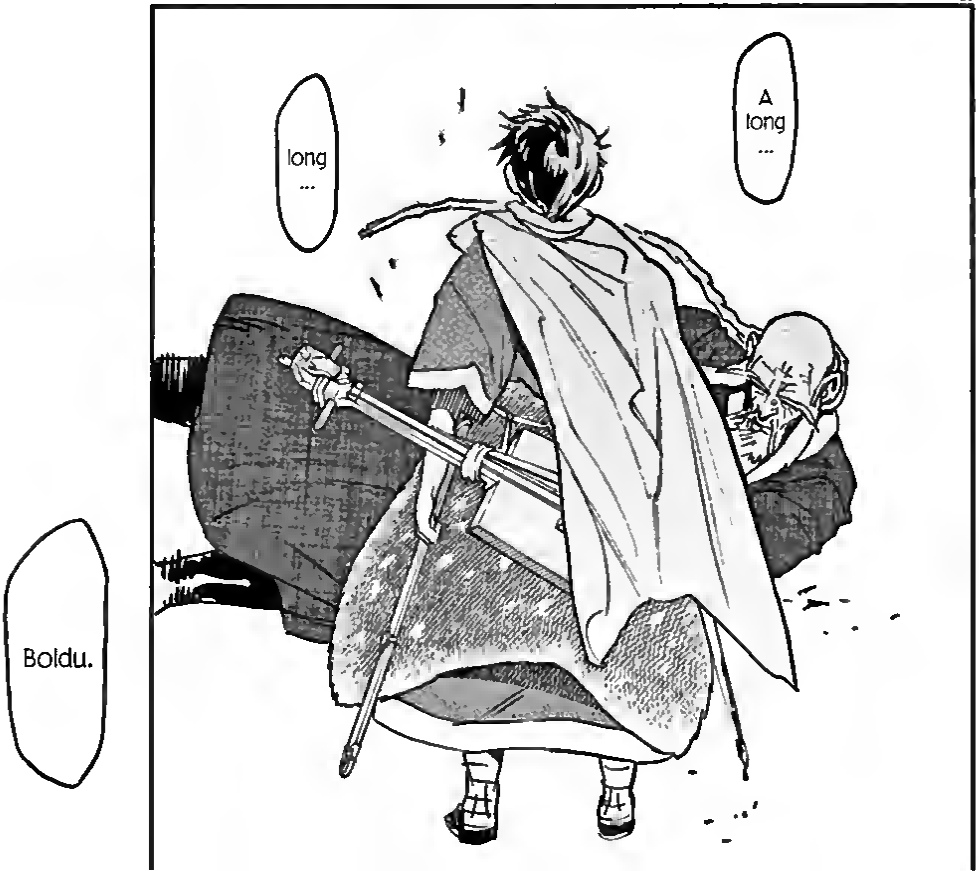
If he seems like he's plotting something, shoot him.
the old man who left the Tsog with Yurui.

It doesn't matter if you hit the boy, as long as he's still breathing.
If he tries to let the old man escape, he probably gave him something.

Boldu.
Leave the Voice of Jade and run.
You're alive...
If Master Yurul lets me escape,
they'll shoot us both dead.
In that case, Master Yurul,
I'm joining the Mongols,
and with them, I will—

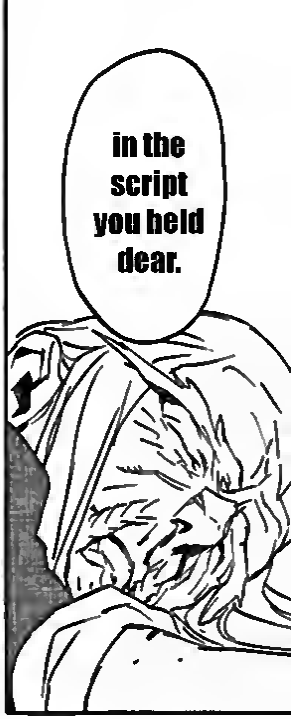
you must show them proof.
22
The Voice of Jade is in the hut.
I've forced Master Harabal to rest.

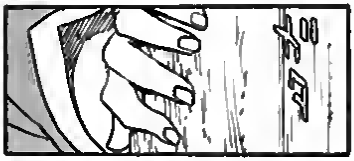

you must live a long, long life...
if you can make your way amongst them as a spy,
Master Yurul,
I know what you're thinking.


Boldu.
long ...
A long ...

You never told me your story.
I will remember you

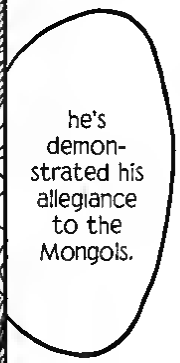
remember you...!
I will


in the script you held dear.



Lower your bows.

It might seem too late, but...

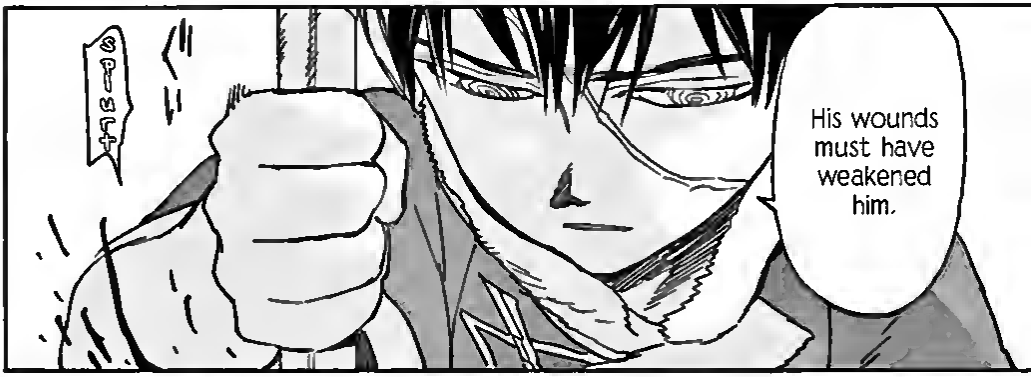

he's demon-strated his allegiance to the Mongols.

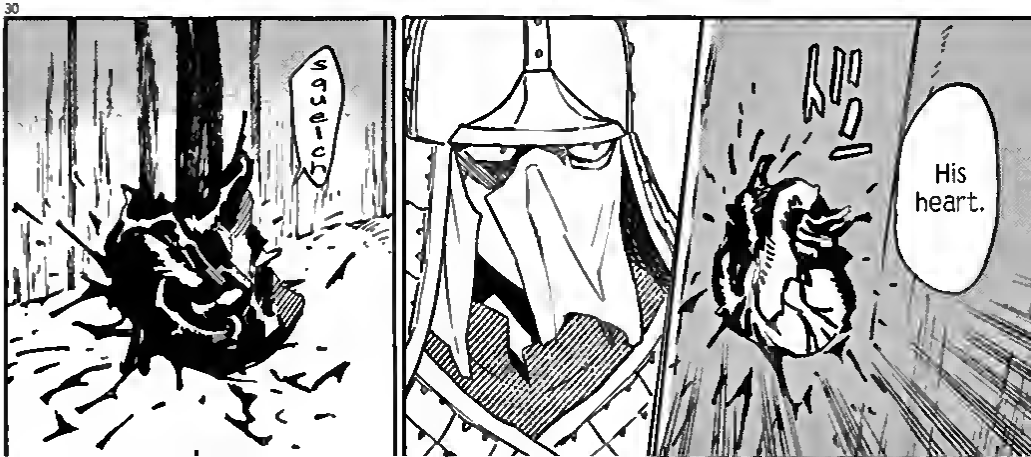
27

Boldu's nee-dles...
Brother... No, Hara-bal,
you know this writing.
You shouldn't be able to move for a while with those in you,
and yet you struck at me with willpower alone.

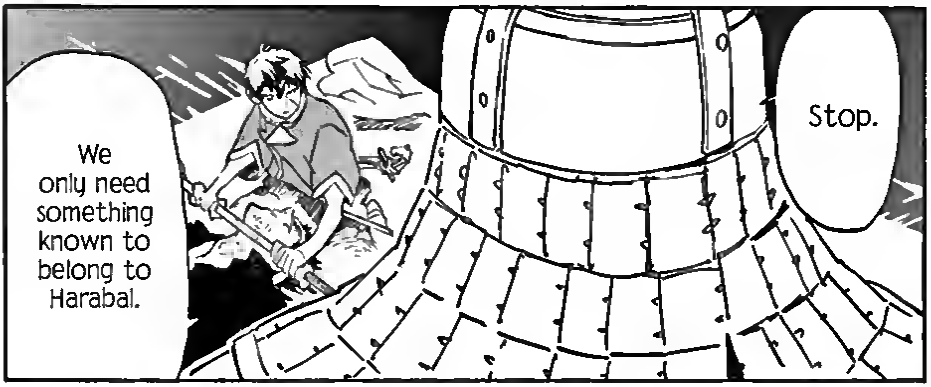
You can read them.
the hatred and suffering of the Mongols' Great Khan.
The shape of the characters transferred to my back:
Mother taught us both.

He's dead.


spish
His wounds must have weakened him.


squelch
His heart.

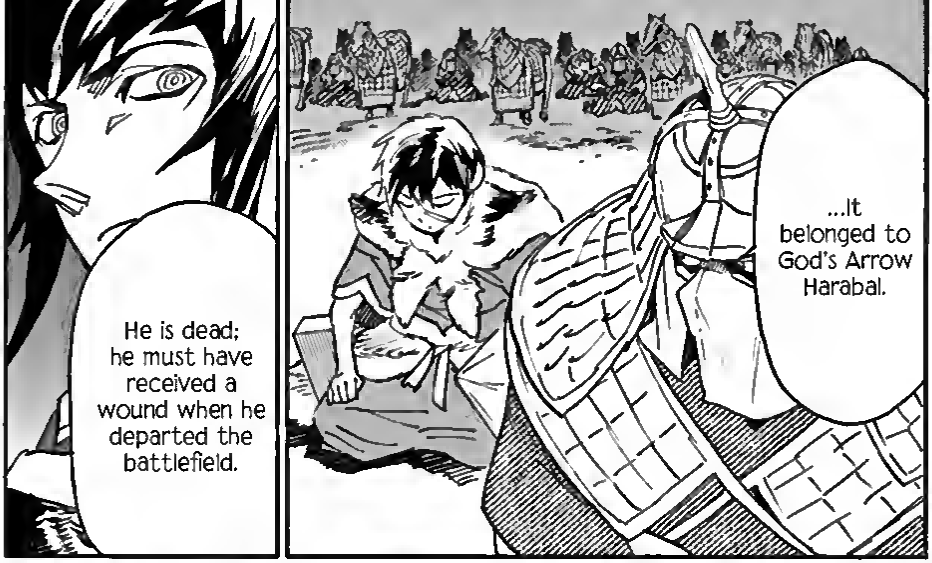
Now I will cut off his head.


We only need something known to belong to Harabal.
Stop.

He was your own brother...!
Coward.

[Chapter LXXVIII]

Hounds


He is dead; he must have received a wound when he departed the battlefield.
...It belonged to God's Arrow Harabal.

No.
Is this "souvenir" that bit of tiger skin?
It is this.

...Leave us.
High-ness...

You want to ask me about these carved jade slabs.
At least for now. Isn't that right...
The same face as Nalan...
So this is the master Nalan served.
If you intended to kill me, you would not have granted me an audience.
Not even an attempt to dodge?
Those eyes... Father's eyes.
brother?

There are nine in all.
Nalan himself had the other half.
...So, Nalan already told you.
...The Voice of Jade correct?
But when I found him there.
What...?
Nalan had already passed away.

Please, don't go
Veronika got her half of the Voice of Jade
I didn't want to find it
Ah
Did Nalan entrust it to you?
from Nalan's corpse?
...This is the Voice of Jade, isn't it?
And the other half of the Voice of Jade had already been taken from his body.
I see. So Nalan did die there.
Was it you who took it?
...Why would you think that?

You carry a bow-sling as well...
Nalan was wounded in the shoulder and stomach by sling stones like the ones he used.

But why

did you cut off his head at the end?

Veronika.
...It was a bandit.
A woman bandit from Western Xia carried it off.

Now, we're done talking.
I know where Shut Hell is going.
So it was you... Shut Hell.
I assumed the Mongols had half the Voice of Jade thanks to Nalan.
I know that I will never be able to rest easy.
I am the Great Khan's illegitimate son: wherever I run to.
What do you hope to gain by selling out the woman?

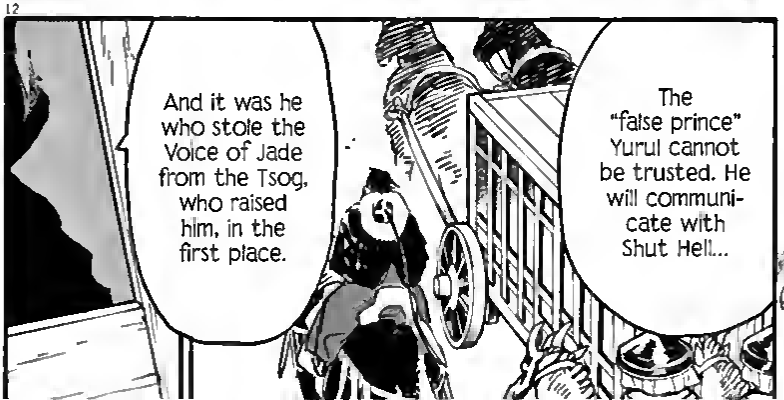
"brother."
Therefore, I want to serve you.
Not with these words of shame carved into my back.
The Mongols may practice ultimogeniture, but I cannot hope for greatness.
You must be joking.
"Slave of the Tangut," the same as *him*.

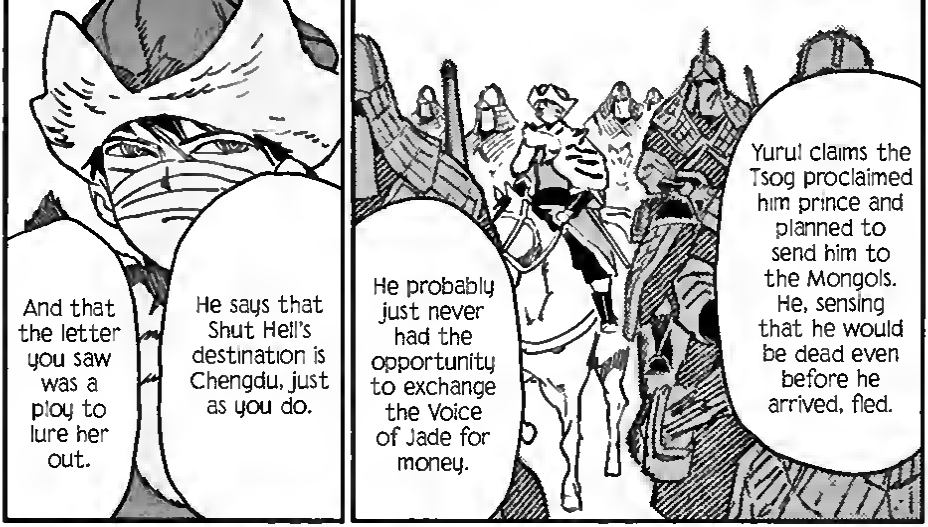
If I claim to be the youngest son and seek status among the Mongols
you need only reveal these words on my back and the Voice of Jade.
As long as you have the Voice of Jade, I cannot defy you.
I shouldn't have to tell him
that the Voice of Jade can command the same power
against the current Great Khan.
I suppose you think you're clever.
I'm going to cut you down, and then I'm going to smash the Voice of Jade. That will be the end of it.

Maybe even
better than Nalan was.
I brought you the Black Tiger's skin and half the Voice of Jade,
and I know where Shut Hell and the other half are going.
We're related by blood and I'm a hard worker; I'll make a good, safe hound.

Your highness.

To To!!


And it was he who stole the Voice of Jade from the Tsog, who raised him, in the first place.
The "false prince" Yurui cannot be trusted. He will communicate with Shut Hell...


Yurul claims the Tsog proclaimed him prince and planned to send him to the Mongols. He, sensing that he would be dead even before he arrived, fled.
He probably just never had the opportunity to exchange the Voice of Jade for money.
He says that Shut Hell's destination is Chengdu, just as you do.
And that the letter you saw was a ploy to lure her out.

Either way, once the entire Voice of Jade is in Mongol hands,
I'll end up killing him eventually.
More importantly, Veronika,
you'd better sleep as much as you can.

Your legs must hurt, and it's a long way to Chengdu.
...You took the Voice of Jade from Nalan's corpse.
and you said nothing about it.
That's right.

I am prepared.

As to your punishment, I have obtained the Great Khan's pardon
This will be all. You're fortunate

Ugh...
You are Mongol property, Veronika.
Even if you are under suspicion of conspiring with Shut Hell and hiding the Voice of Jade.
The Great Khan.. No,
I will forgive you.

Thank you... very much...
...You're strong.
Strong enough to lop off a head just like mine without much difficulty
Your highness,
what angers you most?
is that...

So, you're heading west to Chengdu... with Tolui.
Yes. Before there are any major developments in the siege here
I also plan to inspect the Jin cities you subdued before arriving at Zhongdu.
Veronika,
you and I are more alike than ever.
I don't know if I would have killed you or pardoned you myself,
but now that you've been punished, I suppose I shall leave you at my side
Tolui's Mongols have grown interesting.

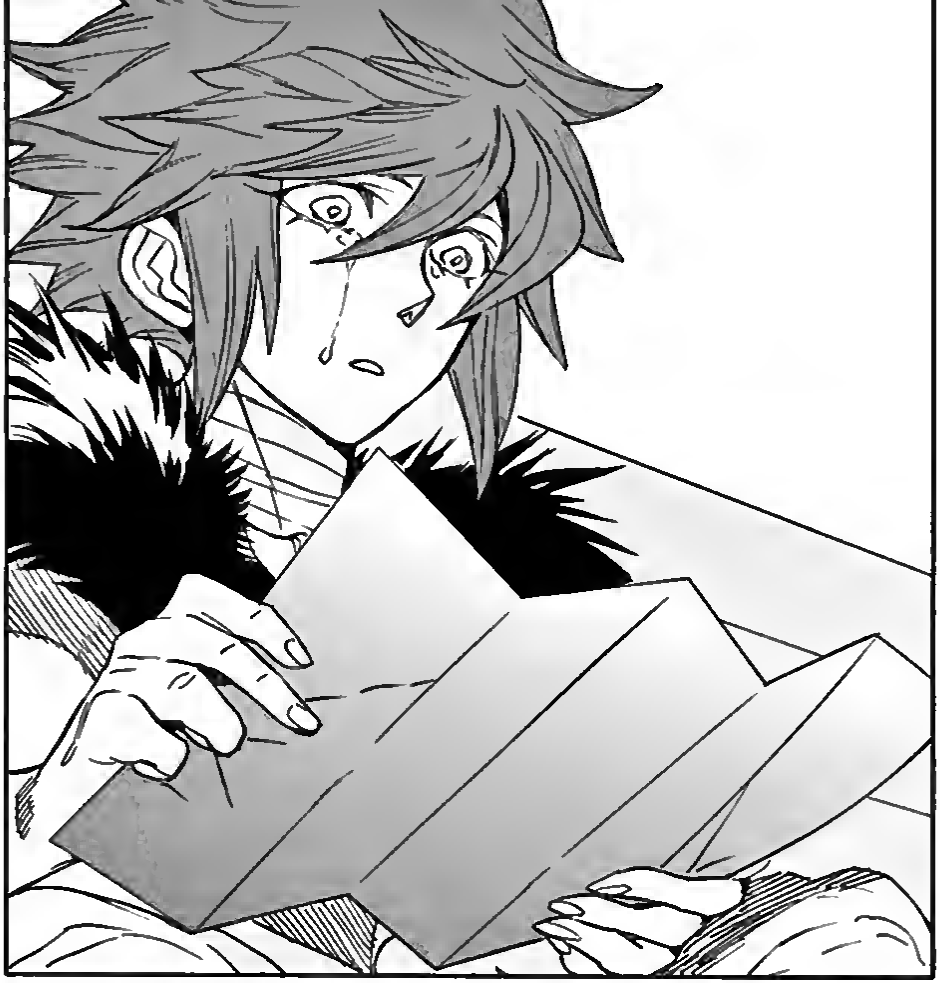
5 DAYS LATER,
NEAR DATONG, ROUGHLY
280KM WEST OF ZHONGDU—
DEAR SUPOH,
Justin
I USUALLY JUST WRITE DOWN THE EVENTS OF THE DAY,
BUT TONIGHT I WILL WRITE AS THOUGH I AM SPEAKING TO YOU.

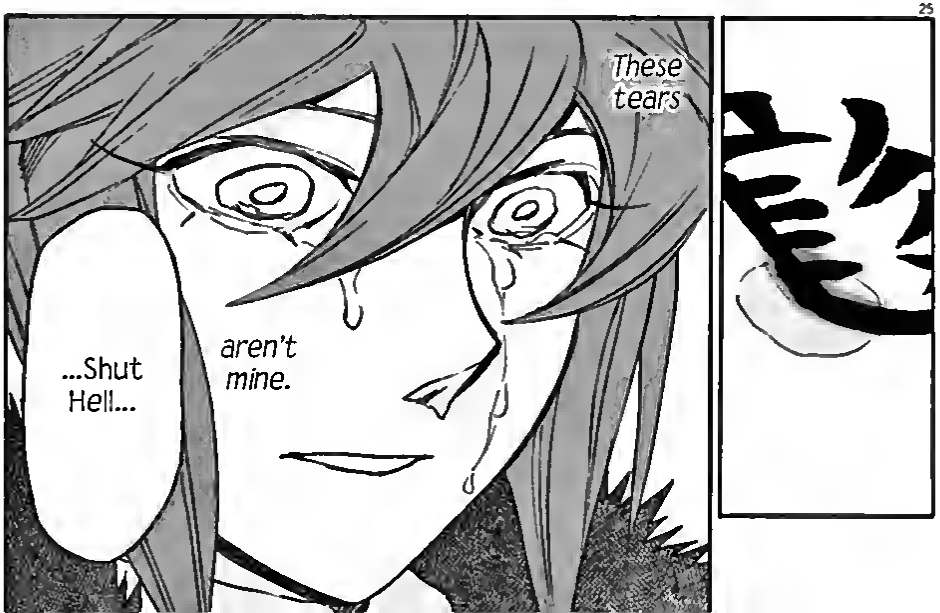
A LAND WHERE EVERYONE CAN EXPRESS THEIR HEARTS, COMMUNICATE, AND BUILD BONDS WITH WRITING.
THAT DREAMLAND WHERE EVERYONE WRITES IN THEIR OWN WORDS AS THEY PLEASE.
That's just normal, isn't it?
.....
SUPOH, I PRAY THAT YOU HAVE GONE HOME TO THE LAND YOU ONCE TOLD ME OF.
THERE, AN ENDLESS AMOUNT OF HAPPENINGS, HEARTS AND MEMORIES MUST ALWAYS BE BEING WRITTEN AT AN INCREDIBLE SPEED.
I IMAGINE IT AS A VAST, SWIFT RIVER.
NO ONE COULD EVER DRAIN THAT GREAT RIVER DRY.
NOT ANY KING OR ANY ARMY.

IT ALWAYS MANAGES TO CHEER ME UP.
WHENEVER I THINK OF THAT COUNTRY, REAL, AND YET DISTANT AS A DREAM,
weren't normal to you...?
So things like that
Yurui.
21
FOR A SHORT WHILE, I WALKED SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER WITH THE FUTURE.
SUPOH, YOU ARE LIVING PROOF THAT THAT COUNTRY IS NO PIPE DREAM;
THAT IT'S A TALKING, LAUGHING, LIVING FUTURE.

I'VE MISSED THE WAY YOU USED TO GREET ME. GRASPING MY HAND TIGHT.
SUDOH,
FROM NOW, UNTIL THE DAY I DAY.
BUT MEETING SHUT HELL AND YOU HAS GIVEN ME STRENGTH.
YOU, SUDOH, GAVE ME SOMETHING TO RELY ON.
SHUT HELL SHOOK MY HEART.
It's ant dreams ar sentimant yea see.
It's the real future.
Will you remember them for me...
Yurui?
The names of my com-
I DO NOT WANT THE WRITING OF MY MOTHER'S LAND — WESTERN XIA — TO DISAPPEAR. IT'S ONLY A SMALL WISH,
He sure sounds excited, though.
If we do meet again, I wonder if he'll die of embar-rassment.
23
22

AND DO WHAT I CAN.
I'M GOING TO MEET THE GREAT KHAN,
IT WASN'T THE END. I'M GOING TO CHASE HER.
I'M GOING TO LIVE
WITH SHUT HELL.
SHUT HELL BRUSHED HER CHEEK AGAINST MINE AT THE END.
I WON'T FORGET IT.
NO, IT WASN'T THE END.
!




These tears
aren't mine.
...Shut Hell...

WHEN THAT HAPPENS, WE'LL MEET AGAIN.
WE'LL MEET AGAIN, SUDOH. I'M SURE OF IT.
I BELIEVE THAT THE TANGUT SCRIPT — OUR SCRIPT — WILL SURVIVE;
THAT MY WORDS WILL REACH YOU IN YOUR LAND, FAR AWAY IN TIME AND SPACE.
!

It's a real nuisance.
I thought the fighting had already come and gone here.
They were mixed in with ones in Han, Khitan, and even Jurchen...
Apparently they still had Sutras in Tangut script, which the Mongols banned.
The Mongols are burning that temple.

Let there be no mistake.
Burn it all.

Wasted arrows. They'd have burned to death on their own.
If they did survive, they'd hold a grudge.
I will cut unnecessary evil off at the source.
For the Mongols' sake.

31
30

...Yurui.

To be continued in [Shut Hell] Volume 13...

【手伝ってくれた人々】
井口文枝
大川亜由美
椿 克彦
前嶋重機
松山由希
渡邉忠司

【感 謝】
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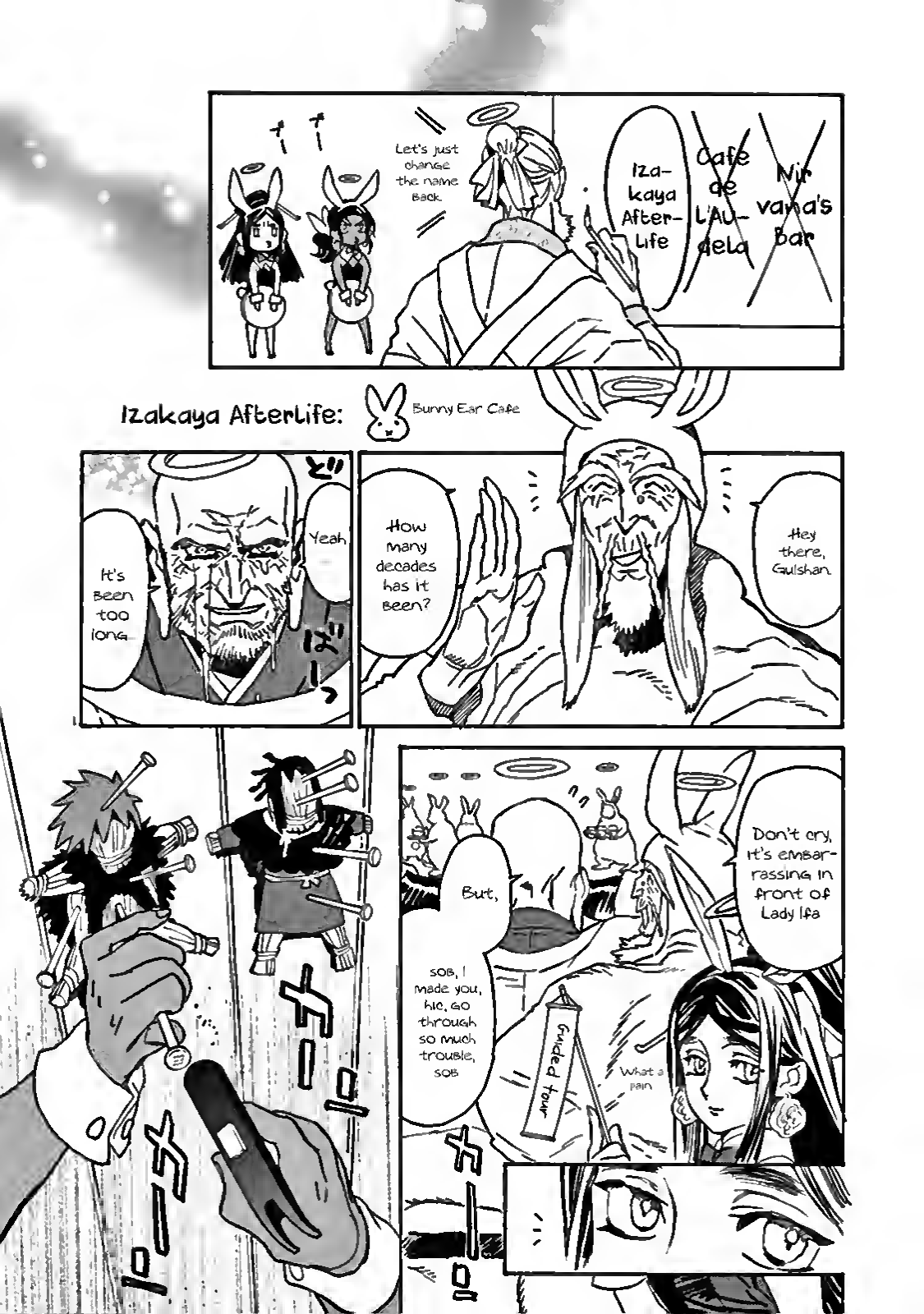
佐藤貴保(盛岡大学文学部准教授)
松井 太(大阪大学大学院文学研究科准教授)
毛利英介(関西大学CSAC研究員)

【装 幀】
孝橋淳二


Izakaya AfterLife
Cafe de L'Au-dela
Nirvana's Bar
Let's just change the name back
Izakaya AfterLife: Bunny Ear Cafe
Hey there, Gulshan
How many decades has it been?
Yeah
It's been too long
Don't cry, it's embarrassing in front of Lady Ifa
But,
sob, I made you, Ifa, go through so much trouble, sob
Guided Tour
What a pain

That's why I'll always be here waiting for her,
Veronika should be free to choose her own life.
I mean, I ended up as well-done as you can get myself
Shakira.
She'll be fine here, even without feet
I'm fine.
with this Black and pink Bunny costume !
Really?
Ifa, did you just kick me before I could say anything?
That's right!
Not at all
Looks like fu—

シュトヘル12

ビッグ スピリッツ コミックス スペシャル

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